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CRY HYLAS ON THE HILLS

By the same author

FIDUS ACHATES

*CRY HYLAS
ON THE HILLS*

BY
GEORGE BAKER



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TO IRIS

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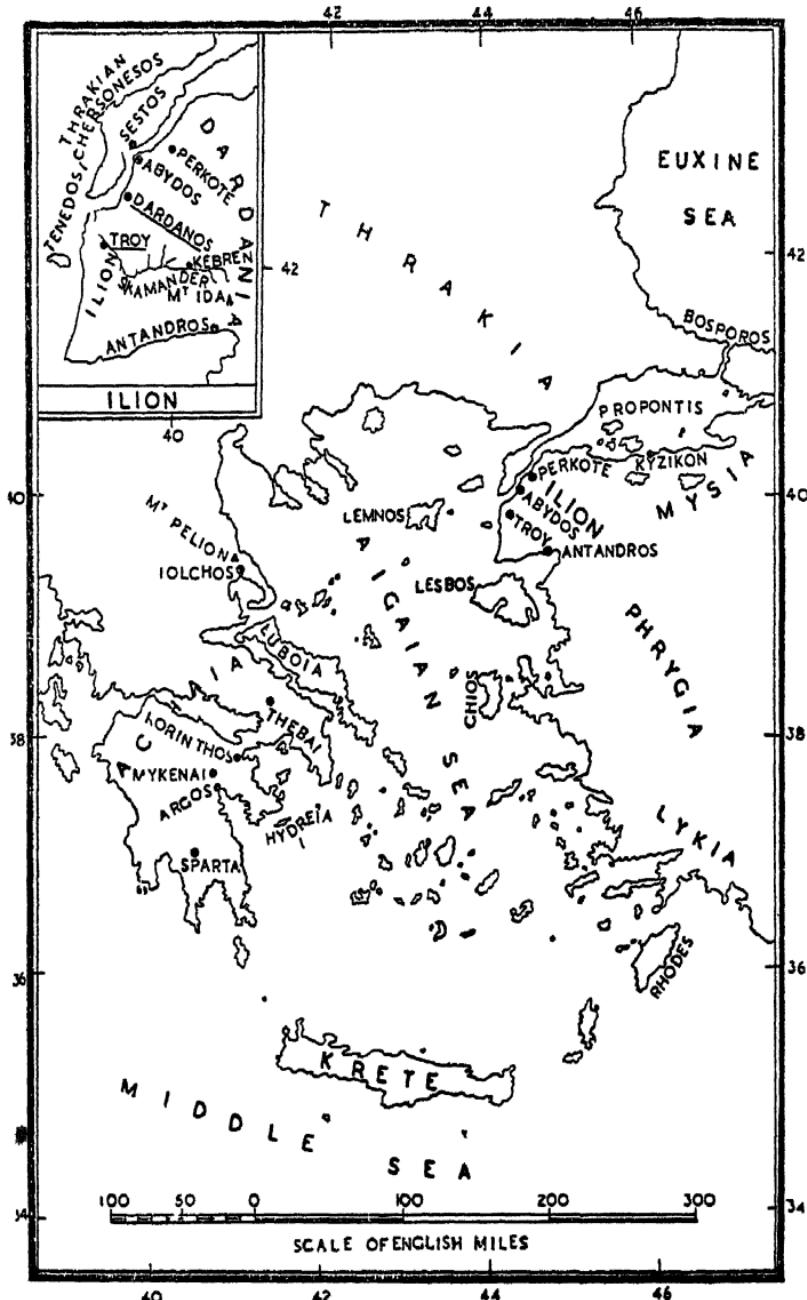
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FOREWORD

Elsewhere I, Achates of Dardania, have told the story of my youth and love. Old men are notably garrulous, and the lure of recountal is hard to resist. Here, then, is a tale of yet earlier times ; of my father, and those with whom he sailed in the *Argo*; of my mother, and the manner of their wooing.

It is not my purpose to record the expedition of the Achaians against Kolchis. Abler tongues than mine have told that deathless tale—well known to many more than my story will ever reach. Rather am I concerned with one or two who sailed from Iolchos, and what befell them in a foreign land whither they were borne by the *Argo*, though they never saw the golden city of Aletes, nor shared with Iason the perilous quest and the long weary home-returning.

Much of this I have heard from my father's lips; much from those who have known the Argonauts. There have been gaps and inconsistencies, for all this happened long ago, when Id Laomedon ruled in Troy. These I have tried to bridge and reconcile from what seems to me most probable; but if sometimes I have erred, remember that my purpose is merely to make a tale for the telling over a winter fire.



One

The boy sang gently to himself; a tuneless, wordless song that went on and on, aimless and unconscious as his thoughts. The slow hooves of the heifer as it drew his father's plough may have shaped the rhythm of his song, the long rise of the hills from the sea-coast formed its cadences. Of these he was oblivious. The high thin veils of white unmoving cloud were no more remote from the shoreside field than the dreams among which the child moved.

Where the leisurely waves broke on a rocky shore the thin smoke rose from a cluster of small houses, newly built. A russet sail beyond dipped to the gentle wind as a boat put out. The boy saw it; his thoughts came back, and wondered at the magic of all boats.

Six months ago he had never seen the sea. When his father had said that here they would settle and build, he had said nothing, but a paian of praise had sung in his heart. He had known mountains, rivers, springs; these, too, were here; but the changing blue of the sea, as if the sky had found a sister, aroused a deep, inarticulate emotion in him. At first he had been impressed by its vastness, too frightened to follow the laughing men into the fringe of its immensity. But when it became clear that they were not being swallowed up, that the small waves wanted to play, he grew more bold, splashing and screaming with the other children, venturing deeper until the water lapped his shoulders.

He loved the sea. For hours together he sat by it, staring at the horizon, wondering what strange lands and unknown people lay beyond. He had heard tales from travellers who had seen these things, and had shivered at their daring. Some of his father's men had made boats, and sailed them on the bay when the fish shoaled, catching in woven nets the glittering lovely things that jumped and slithered so strangely, taking so long to die. But to sail away, out of sight of land, borne by the winds over that earth-embracing water, seemed to the boy almost more than human courage might dare. He regarded those who had done so as demi-gods. However wonderful

their tales, he believed them all. He never suspected, even remotely, that things might be other than they said.

He had never been so happy as in this new land, where the hills sloped down to the sea. He had lived the first ten years of his life in the Aitolian land, overshadowed by Mount Oita, until the menace of the wild mountain men had driven his father's people to seek a new home where they might till their fields in peace. They had followed the valley of the Kephissos river to the lake of Kophaïs; crossed the Boiotian land to the Theban plain; passed through lonely valleys, by Korinthos, to the lovely land of Argolis. The people of Argos had frowned at their passing and the Dryopes, hoping that nobody there would know with how few cattle they had begun their journey, drove their swollen herds ever southward, until from the mountains that lay athwart their track they saw the southern sea.

Theiodamas had led them down to the untenanted coast; in a basin enclosed by hills, watered by tumbling streams, they made their home. And now the plough was busy; the rich dark soil broke away from the sharpened stake in long furrows while the white-winged gulls flew screaming behind. The boy watched his father as he climbed the sloping field, and smiled at him as he turned the furrow.

Theiodamas was to his son what every father is until the golden age of childhood passes and the veil is rent: god, hero, king. The pattern upon which life is to be moulded; the standard by which all others must be judged. A high responsibility, of which Theiodamas, remembering his boyhood, was not unaware. But his people absorbed so much of his thought that he was not always responsive to his son's unspoken worship.

Here beneath the morning sky, though, while the upthrown light made a snowy purity of the underside of the seagulls' wings, his mind was more free, and he glanced often at the small still figure who waited to smile at him as he climbed the long slope. Though for an hour they had exchanged no word, the man found a peculiar pleasure in the company of his son, who might have been playing with the other boys down in the steading, or swimming in the sea. It was by his own choice that Hylas had followed the heifer to

the field of ploughing. His reward lay in his father's answering smile; and in the long, dim wanderings of his mind among far-off, unknown things, conjured by the sparkle of the changing sea, while his quiet voice rose and fell in a happy, wordless song.

* * *

Soon after dawn the men of Argos had risen from their camp at the northern end of the pass and followed Herakles to a brow overlooking the Dryopian settlement. They spoke little, frowning as they marked the new furrows and the circling gulls, fingering their spears as the low of grazing cattle came remotely up the rocky slopes.

"We are more than they," Herakles said, "but we will wait until they are well scattered. Then we'll burn their houses and drive them into their boats. They may live as they please upon the islands."

Likymnios, his uncle, nodded. This was no battle for which they were preparing, in which honour might be gained, though there might be fighting before the day was done. It was simply an expulsion of unwanted settlers from a fertile land, as yet uncultivated by the Argives, but precious nevertheless. The Dryopes were a peaceful folk, by report, but the men of Argos did not mean to be deceived.

Herakles made a sign and the force of a hundred men moved forward; the sun glinted on their spears as they descended the slope, advancing in a long open line so as to enclose the workers in the fields, driving them down to the steading and the sea. Herakles and his uncle kept the centre. In the highest of the newly-turned fields they bore down upon a single figure behind a heifer-drawn plough, now still. Herakles twirled his spear, frowning as he looked upon the heifer's markings.

"Land-thief and cattle-thief," he said, "that heifer is from my father's herd."

"Easily said," Theiodamas replied, "to an unarmed man. The heifer is mine, calf of a calf I reared in the valley below Oita."

"Be that as it may, when you return to the valley of Oita, that heifer will remain with my father's herds."

From the first appearance of the Argives on the hillside Theiodamas had realised the futility of resistance. The time and direction of their attack had been well chosen; the Dryopes had been pushed back to the seashore, singly and in small powerless groups. Behind him he could hear shouting, and a woman's scream. His heart was sick with the ending of his hopes. For a long time he had waited and watched, ready by day and night to meet a dispossessor; but so long had passed that he had allowed his people's vigilance to relax, relying more and more on a sufferance implied by the Argives' inactivity.

And now the blow had fallen. Already the smoke was drifting uphill from the shore. His people must journey again, always suspect and unwelcome, until they found a place too barren to be cared about, or too remote and desolate for powerful neighbours to covet. His smile as he faced the young leader of the Argives was twisted with bitterness.

"We are a small people," he said, "and ask little but a field or two to give us food, and a place for sleeping. As to the cattle, tribute will be gladly paid——"

"Argos wants no wandering outcasts," Herakles replied. "There is room enough in the world elsewhere. Get you to your boats, leaving the cattle behind."

"Who was it named me cattle-thief?"

Herakles' brow contracted; his nostril quivered, and he poised his spear. With a swift movement the Dryope pulled a knife from his bearskin tunic and threw it. Just in time Herakles moved aside. The spinning blade caught his upper arm; he grunted, and, stung with the sudden pain, threw his spear. Theiodamas lurched, and stared at him with eyes grown suddenly great as he plucked ineffectively at the haft protruding from his chest. Then, very slowly, staring still at Herakles, he sank to his knees.

A shout from the steading drew Herakles' eyes from the dying man, no more to be feared; he started to run shoreward, almost not noticing the boy who came slipping from behind him and knelt by Theiodamas. Likymnios glanced back over his shoulder as he followed. It was only a child, and the heifer was standing patiently still. Time enough to unyoke

it from the plough when the Dryopes had been sent sailing from the land.

Hylas put a thin arm about his father's shoulders and looked fearfully into his face. He had never seen a man at point of death; he didn't know that his god's mortality was showing in the grey pallor beneath the sunbrown skin. With a great effort Theiodamas lifted his head and smiled faintly, though there was blood at his mouth and his eyes were heavy.

The smile reassured Hylas. His father wasn't badly hurt if he could smile like that. Not until long years afterward did he realise what it must have cost the dying man to conceal his last agony from the child's eyes, to smile as if he were still at the plough, turning the uphill furrow.

Hylas smiled back, with relief and encouragement. Theiodamas stared hungrily, burning the memory upon his darkening mind, to go with him to the shades. Then he fell forward with a choking cough, rolled over twitching, and presently lay still.

When Hylas knew that his father was dead he didn't cry. He was numbed. He stared down, wondering at the mystery of death, trying to grapple with the unbelievable thought that the dark face would never smile again, the limbs move, the voice speak his name. Such a swift transition paralysed his undeveloped reason. It couldn't be true. Perhaps if he pulled the spear out, his father might not stay dead. He couldn't think what to do, more than that. The women might know. They were used to these things.

He looked down the hill. The women were all gone. The houses were ablaze, the nearer sea dotted with overloaded boats. Some of the Argives were returning up the hillside, driving the cattle, laughing and calling to each other. On the shore a few Dryopian men lay still and asprawl.

There was no hope there. The Argives had driven everyone away, so contemptuous of the poor Dryopian breed that they despised them even as slaves. Of all the people of Theiodamas, only Hylas remained alive upon the Argolian land.

Two men were coming up the hill toward him; the big man who had thrown the spear and his grey-haired companion.

Hylas waited for them, small and still against the great still background of hills.

Herakles glanced at him and down at Theiodamas; then again, uncertainly, at the white-faced boy. Hylas stared back unblinkingly.

“He threw a knife, or I shouldn’t have killed him,” Herakles said. He found the child’s gaze peculiarly disconcerting, impelling him to justify himself. “He is dead, isn’t he?”

Hylas made no reply, though his eyes filled with tears and his mouth quivered. But when Herakles began to unyoke the heifer he caught his arm.

“You mustn’t take the heifer,” he said.

Herakles glanced down at him in some surprise.

“Why not?”

“Because my father said so.”

Herakles rubbed his nose thoughtfully. Likymnios grinned. Like all the men of Perseus’ blood, Herakles was big-boned and tall. Though not yet twenty he was stronger than any man in all the overlordship of Mykenai. Also his conception of public service, in his uncle’s view at least, was exaggerated beyond reason; his chivalry and gentleness were matters of common talk. But he had not yet acquired through experience that knowledge of the minds of men which is the first requirement of kingship. Likymnios waited with interest to see how he would handle this matter.

After some thought—

“But the heifer is one of ours,” Herakles said.

“My father said it wasn’t.”

“Then your father was a liar as well as a thief.”

With a strangled cry the boy leaped on Herakles, battering with small fists at the great chest. His teeth were tightly clenched, and he was sobbing. His grief was at last finding vent in rage; unreasoningly he tried to match his small might against the trained strength of the stranger who had killed and then spoken evil of his father. Herakles held him off gently, and grimaced at his laughing uncle.

“O diplomat!” Likymnios murmured.

“What am I to do with him?”

"His people are gone; he must come back with us. We can't leave him here alone."

"And what then?"

Likymnios shrugged. "You killed his father; he's your moral responsibility. No doubt the women will find him useful about the house."

Hylas had exhausted his fury and had ceased to fight. Reaction had overwhelmed him. He knelt beside his father, crying quietly, looking down at the dead face. But at Herakles' first step toward the heifer he sprang between him and the animal, his face still wet, his eyes still brimming. Small, frail but indomitable.

"Oh, damn this!" Herakles muttered. "Now we're going to start all over again. What shall I do?"

"Speak to him kindly. Win his confidence."

"A precious lot of trouble and fuss about one small boy."

"Maybe. You're much better at throwing spears than healing the wounds you make, aren't you?"

Herakles flushed slightly and turned to the boy.

"Now look here," he said, "you must come with me."

"I shan't."

"But—there's nobody left to—to feed you, and put you to bed, and all that."

"I can put myself to bed."

"Not now. I mean, look!" He pointed to the smoke from the steading.

"I don't want to come with you."

"What do you want to do, then?"

"Stay here."

"All alone?"

Hylas glanced down, and up again fearlessly.

"Yes. My father will take care of me."

"Your father! But he's—"

Likymnios laid a hand upon his nephew's arm.

"What is your name?" he asked the boy in a gentle tone.

"Hylas. My father was the king."

"Oh! Well, Hylas, we are going to take care of you. First we'll bury your father, and then we'll take you to a new home. We shan't let anyone be unkind to you."

Hylas regarded him searchingly without moving.

"You aren't going to have the heifer," he said.

"No. No, of course not. She's yours; your very own."

Herakles stared at his uncle and drew a deep breath. Likymnios ignored him.

"We didn't want to hurt anyone," he went on, "only to send them away. Our king told us to. People always have to do what the king says, don't they? Even if they don't always think it's right?"

Slowly the boy nodded.

"Your father was a brave man, Hylas. He died as a king should die—with his face to the enemy. We will give him a king's burial. Then we'll go home."

Old man and child exchanged a long look. Then Hylas turned and began to unyoke the heifer.

"I will come with you," he said over his shoulder.

Herakles rubbed his chin. He still had a lot to learn. Fortunately he had the sense to realise it.

* * *

The men of Argos laughed when they heard how Herakles had been assailed with violence by their solitary captive; but Likymnios spoke to them, and they buried Theiodamas where he had died, giving him the rites proper to a fallen king. Hylas watched them gravely, standing straight and proud and still. When all was done Herakles laid a hand upon his shoulder.

"There!" he said. "Now we'll have some dinner."

The boy didn't answer. He stared out to sea. The sails of his people had merged into the far wide shape of the island which lay across the horizon.

"Come along, Hylas," Herakles said. He caught the child's quick upward glance, and was astonished at the blaze of fierce, implacable hatred he read in the dark eyes. Hylas didn't shake the hand from his shoulder; he bent down as if to tighten his sandal, but when he rose it was at a pace's distance from Herakles. Then he moved across the hillside to the fire, and sat by Likymnios.

Herakles shrugged and followed, finding a place on the

opposite side of the circle. Hylas didn't even glance at him throughout the meal. Likymnios watched his nephew covertly. He had no particular interest in the child, but much in Herakles. Unless he were much mistaken, the rather simple-hearted young giant would be piqued by the boy's dislike of him into trying to win his affection. Also he would feel guilty about having killed Theiodamas. Not that it mattered much; but it was time he learnt not to be so hasty. Hylas would be a reminder. And in taking charge of the boy Herakles would learn somewhat of fatherhood. He'd be having children of his own soon. Megara must be near her time. Perhaps she would have a child to show when they came again to Thebæi. A son, if the gods were kind.

Perhaps Herakles was thinking that, too, as he stared across at Hylas; thinking that one day a son of his own would look up to him, watch for his smile, glow at his praise. And hate those who spoke evilly of him. Perhaps that was why the young man's face was slightly wistful. He didn't like being disliked, especially by children. Not out of vanity; but because he concluded that the fault lay in him, and was made uneasy. Since Megara had conceived he had shown an increased liking for the small people, watching their games in the fields about Thebæi; teaching the little boys to throw their tiny spears, giving rides to the smallest upon his great broad back. There was much of the child in his own simplicity and directness, his bursts of spontaneous generosity and equally instant rage. He had no guile. It would be easy to hoodwink him, trick him. But it would be a bad day for his deceiver when Herakles stumbled upon the truth. . . .

Herakles rose and crossed the circle; he bent down, and Likymnios saw then that Hylas had lain back and gone to sleep. The wind had freshened and clouds gathered; it was cool upon the open hillside. Herakles spread his cloak over the boy's thin body, and looked up to meet his uncle's quizzical glance.

"Don't let him know it's mine," he said in a low voice; and sat down on the other side of the sleeping boy. Hylas didn't stir. Unaccustomed emotions, nervous excitement and a big dinner had drawn him down into a dreamless sleep which would not be easily disturbed. Herakles grinned at his uncle.

"Your so-called diplomacy," he remarked, "has cost me a heifer, without the slightest return. There are those who might even call it a bribe."

Likymnios shrugged. "What would you have? The boy's father died defending it. Also," he added, although the thought had only just struck him, "it is your father who will have lost the heifer. It will graze with yours at Thebai."

Herakles began to laugh. Hylas sighed deeply, and stirred so that the cloak was disarranged. Herakles covered him afresh.

One of the Argives had been staring curiously; he smiled, and whispered to his neighbour. Herakles went round to him and jerked him to his feet.

"I have remarked before upon your filthy mind, Eryon," he said; and felled him with a blow on the forehead that left him unconscious.

Likymnios twitched his nose. There was something to be said, after all, for simple directness. Also Herakles seemed to have a trifle more perception than he had supposed.

When the fire had been stamped out and the cattle rounded up, Likymnios roused the boy. Hylas yawned, stretched and blinked sleepily. Then the corners of his mouth drooped. Likymnios held out a stick.

"Like to drive your own heifer?" he said. Hylas nodded, rose and roused the animal. Presently the herd, lowing their protest, were headed for the pass. Just before a shoulder of the mountains closed them in Hylas looked back. Only for a moment; he said nothing, neither could anything be read from his face. But he glanced then at Herakles, and gave his heifer a quite unnecessary whack.

"I shouldn't trust him with a knife, yet awhile," Likymnios remarked; and Herakles nodded, grinning.

When the boy began to tire Likymnios set him upon the heifer's back. Some of the men walked beside them, trying out of idleness to win a word or a smile; but Hylas ignored them all, so that they wandered away again, keeping the slow herd on the move through the valleys and looking out for a likely place in which to spend the night.

It took them three leisurely days to come to Argos.

Except from a distance Hylas had never seen a city. Argos impressed him mightily. When they came to Mykenai his wonder deepened. The most his people had ever raised in their defence was an earthwork surmounted by a wooden palisade. But here were great high walls of stone, immensely thick, pierced by gates of heavy bronze at which an enemy might batter for a long time without forcing. Westward and southward from the rugged height upon which the city stood spread the Argeian plain; above it towered two great mountain peaks, watching the roads that led from far-off places beyond the Korinthian Gulf.

Here Eurystheos reigned, overlord of all the country for seven days' journey about. Here were made the shining swords and spears, the arms and armour that were the glory of Achaia. Here craftsmen unrivalled in the known world wrought in gold and bronze, wood and clay to the honour of Zeus and Hera. Poets sang of Apollo, the lordly one, the ever-young, lord of the morning. Here lived a people free, gracious and brave; strong, too, and beautiful in their strength. A people who made war when they must, but gave equal honour to the arts of peace. Who required strong men to be gentle, beautiful women virtuous.

Herakles might in time have come to the kingship of Mykenai had not an unfortunate accident robbed his father Amphitryon of the throne; for in a dispute over some cattle before the days of Eurystheos Amphitryon had killed the old king. Some said that the killing was accidental; others gave it a less charitable interpretation. Whatever the truth of the matter, it eventually cost Amphitryon his succession to the throne.

Elektryon had married his niece Anaxo, Amphitryon's elder sister; he was a man of hasty temper and had been king for so long that he could not bear to be crossed. He was not popular among the Mykenians, who, easy-going themselves, disliked a ruler who was moody, unpredictable and at times irrational. His daughter, too, was like that. Being so near in blood she should not have married Amphitryon; but when he offered to

lead an expedition against the piratical Teleboians who had killed all her brothers in a raid, she fell so violently in love with him that not even his reluctance would have deterred her. Such a small matter as consanguinity was to her of very little account.

Amphitryon, however, was the reverse of reluctant; and Elektryon, who for obvious reasons could hardly object to a marriage of cousins, gave them his blessing. So Amphitryon chased the pirates out of Aitolia in a brief, well-handled campaign, and presently came back and married Alkmena. As Elektryon's son-in-law he was heir to the throne of Mykenai, and a prosperous future seemed assured until it came to the dividing of the cattle he had brought back from his raid on the Teleboians.

Nobody saw how Elektryon died. Amphitryon's story was that a bull had charged the old king; that he, Amphitryon, had thrown a heavy stone at it which, rebounding from its horns, had struck Elektryon on the temple, so that he died. Shoulders were shrugged, of course; but the old king was undoubtedly dead, and nobody felt hot enough about it to rise against Amphitryon, who would certainly have been king in another year or two at most.

But the old king's brother Sthenelos saw an opportunity. Hot with virtuous indignation he descended unexpectedly upon Amphitryon and turned him out of Mykenai, assuming the kingship himself. He certainly spared Amphitryon's life, but banished him to the comparative obscurity of Thebai. And nobody troubled much about that, either.

So Herakles was born the son of a deposed monarch, but bore no resentment, even though Sthenelos' son Eurystheos, king now in Mykenai, had little liking for him and seemed to delight in asserting his own dominance and Herakles' vassalage.

Since the hour of their almost simultaneous birth there had been rivalry between the boys, descended both from fiery Perseus and southern Andromeda. Likymnios, who might have succeeded his father Elektryon but for his sister's marriage, had no taste for kingship and cared little who ruled so long as the land was at peace. But he sometimes wondered if the old flame might one day flare up again. There were

plenty of men in Argos, Tiryns and Thebai who would rather call the popular Herakles king than dark-browed, vindictive Eurystheos. Perhaps Eurystheos knew that; but if so it seemed inconceivably foolish of him to domineer over Herakles to an extent amounting almost to persecution. Perhaps it was his consciousness of inferiority in everything but guile which impelled him to flaunt his power.

There was almost sure to be trouble, sooner or later.

When Herakles came to the palace and reported the success of his expedition Eurystheos nodded.

"It was a small matter," he said. "You could hardly have failed."

Although Herakles knew quite well that a badly-led army might fail against a few bold and desperate men, he made no reply to the implied disparagement. Eurystheos knew nothing of war, though in common with most of the Achaian princes he had been well trained in the use of weapons by Chiron the Kentaur on Mount Pelion. Somewhat slightly built, he had never been able to rival Herakles' feats of strength or endurance, neither had he acquired a like dexterity with weapons. It pleased him, therefore, to commit these enterprises to Herakles, as if such matters of mere strength and force were beneath his own dignity. In his secret heart, however, he rejoiced to have at his call a man possessing all those qualities of military leadership which he lacked; who obeyed him without question and even found means of his own for making the land secure.

One such adventure had won Herakles the lovely Megara for his wife. She was the daughter of Kreon, king of Thebai, a peace-loving old gentleman who paid yearly tribute to the Orchomenians of Lake Kaiphos without mentioning the matter in Mykenai, rather than go to war. But a hundred head of cattle was a grievous toll; and when Herakles in his eighteenth year was given a herd of his own he decided that the thing must stop. It was an old quarrel, which six years of payment had amply compensated. So when the people of Erginos the Orchomenian king came to demand the next year's tribute Herakles, having laid his plans, chased them from the gates of Thebai with blows and imprecations.

The result was exactly as he had expected. Erginos reached for his spear and led the swarthy Minyans into Boiotia. They didn't get far, because Herakles was lying for them near the border, with a respectable force of Theban herd-owners whom he had converted to his way of thinking. Erginos was killed, and the remnant who crept back to Orchomenos judged it best to say no more in the matter of annual tribute, lest the sandal be tied to the other foot.

Greatly relieved that the battle had been fought at such a distance that neither his goods nor his person had been involved, Kreon made much of Herakles and, with an eye to the future, suggested that his union with the princess would be no bad thing. Herakles, who had been of the same mind since his first meeting with Megara, took him at his word. And now, within a year of their being wed, Megara was about to bear her first child.

It is small wonder that Herakles wasted no time in Mykenai, but hurried on to Thebai, taking Hylas with him.

Had Likymnios not been of the little company it is probable that the journey would have passed in unbroken silence, for the boy would not speak to Herakles, nor reply to his remarks. As if to point his hatred he chatted quite freely with Likymnios, while Herakles alternately admired the child's force of character and resented the odium under which apparently he moved.

Things had not been made easier by a dispute at Argos about the heifer, which Herakles learnt for the first time was called Asphodel. For the Dryopian herds had been left there for division among the contingents while Herakles hastened home. But Hylas had refused to be parted from his heifer, nor could Herakles very well leave him behind. The argument was protracted and lively; both protagonists talked at each other through Likymnios, who said no word but in a short time became heartily sick of the whole affair. In the end, though Herakles stamped and swore, Hylas had his way. His small, straight back as he urged Asphodel from the city to the Theban road was a triumph, an insult and a provocation which Herakles found it hard to resist.

"If he were a bit older," he grumbled to his uncle, "I'd

know what to do with him. As it is——” Then his sense of the ridiculous, never far to seek, rose in him, and he laughed. But he felt impelled to lob a small piece of rock gently at the heifer, who leaped and started to run, Hylas in loud pursuit.

“That’s better,” Herakles remarked. “If we can only keep up that pace we shan’t do badly.” And he picked up a few more stones.

Thebai lay beyond the Korinthian Isthmus; like its newer but more powerful neighbour Mykenai it stood upon a height. Two deep ravines, full-flooded after rains, guarded the approaches from east and west. To the south rose the highest peaks of the Teumessian range; northward lay the Theban plain. A wild and lovely spot in a land of hill and stream and wood. The city’s relative unimportance in the Mykenian kingdom lay rather in its people’s slow, stolid, unimaginative nature than in its size or situation.

Hylas, no drawer of fine distinctions, looked upon it and was content. There was grazing enough for Asphodel within its outer wall; water in the stream that flowed at the hillfoot, and a home for himself somewhere among those pleasant houses within the higher gates. The boys looked curiously at him as he passed; poorly clothed, dusty with travel, dark-headed and dark-eyed, he was an obvious alien; but as he was with Herakles they supposed he must be suffered.

Hylas, seeing the rapturous welcome they gave to their returning hero, resolved to hate them all.

Herakles, it appeared, lived in a long single-storied house not far from Kreon’s modest palace. He hastened into the shade of the cool hall, bidding Hylas wait there and calling loudly for someone named Antippe. A woman came forward smiling, finger to lip; she nodded, and Herakles seized her hands.

“A boy?” he demanded

“Yes.”

Herakles uttered a ringing yell of triumph and joy; immediately looked contrite, and tiptoed into a farther room. Hylas quietly kicked a very small dog who came to inspect his foot; stared at it stonily, then burst into sudden tears. He didn’t know why, except that he had never missed his father

so much as now, when for the first time he was quite alone. Likymnios had left them at the gates. The small dog regarded him with his head on one side; took a tentative step forward, and sat down to conduct a close and vigorous search for a tickle behind his ear. He was so fat that presently he rolled over. Hylas choked, gulped and laughed. . . .

The woman Antippe found them rolling on the floor together, the puppy yelping excitedly, Hylas, the tears yet wet upon his face, uttering ferocious growls.

"Stop that noise," she said. Hylas looked up, made a face and tumbled the puppy over on his back.

"Who are you?" Antippe demanded.

"Hylas. Didn't he tell you about me?"

"Who?"

"Him." Hylas pointed briefly to the inner room.

"No. He's other things to think about. Leave that dog alone and stand up. Where are you from?"

"Asine, by the sea. We hadn't been there long, though. My father was the king." Struck by a sudden thought—"I suppose I am, now."

"Is your father dead, then?"

"Yes. He killed him." Hylas nudged the inverted puppy with his foot. "He sent my people away, and stole all our cattle. But I didn't let him have Asphodel."

Antippe, who knew something of the expedition, regarded the boy more intently.

"You'd better come and have a bath," she said, "and some supper. I'll find out what's to be done with you."

She led him through a side door and across an enclosed court to the place where the house servants ate and slept. Two girls of sixteen or so were scouring earthen pots in the open; they looked at him and one, dark and with almost black hair, smiled. He warmed to her at once.

When he was clean Antippe gave him some wheat cakes and a bowl of milk warm from the cow; he took his supper to a bench outside in the court and stared at the girls.

"Hallo, boy," said the short dark one. "What's your name?"

"Hylas. I've come to live here. Where is that pup?"

"The master took him in to see the new baby. Don't you love Thebai? I think it's the nicest place in the world."

Hylas considered. "It's not so big as Mykenai," he replied. "Nor Argos."

The dark girl looked at him with a respect of which he was quite unconscious.

"I've never been out of Thebai—well, round about," she said, and asked him about his travels. The other girl went on scouring cooking vessels, listening but taking no part in the conversation. But even she looked impressed when Hylas told how he had fought with Herakles in the field by the sea.

"What did he do to you?" she asked with awe.

"He let me keep the heifer." Hylas couldn't see that the intervention of Likymnios had any relevance. To his understanding cause was directly related to effect. Herakles had wanted the heifer; he had resisted Herakles; he had kept the heifer. Therefore, quite clearly, he had won. Apparently the girls thought so, too; but looking at Hylas and remembering Herakles they wondered how it had fallen out.

Nobody knew what to do with Hylas. Antippe asked Herakles, but he seemed vague.

"I don't want him treated as a slave, exactly," he said.

"What, then?"

"Oh, I don't know. . . . I suppose you can find a use for him about the house."

"Where is he to sleep?"

"You can arrange something, I have no doubt."

Antippe sighed patiently. Herakles was often like that when his head was full of something else.

"Clothes? That skin thing he's wearing is in a shocking state."

"Well, see what you can do." Herakles grinned suddenly and laid his great hands upon her shoulders. "I don't know where we'd be without you, Antippe," he said.

"Neither do I." But Antippe smiled back at him. Not she alone in Thebai would have done much for Herakles' smile. So perhaps Hylas lay more comfortably that night than if Herakles had given clearer instructions concerning his disposal.

Next morning he went down to see Asphodel. On his way

he came upon a group of boys. They carried bows and a quiver or two of arrows. After the first glance he ignored them and would have passed on, but one, taller than the rest, stopped him.

“I can run faster than you,” he said.

“How do you know?”

“Because I can.”

“You can’t. I can run faster than you.”

“Let’s see you, then.”

“Where to?”

“The gate.”

They ran; the other boys streamed down behind them, shouting and as intent as if all life depended upon the result. Hylas was beaten by a pace or two.

“There you are,” the other boy said. “I told you.”

“I can jump farther than you, though.”

“Of course you can’t. If you can’t run as fast you can’t jump so far.”

They put the matter to the test outside the lower wall. Hylas was beaten again. Spots of colour began to burn in his cheeks.

“I don’t expect you can shoot, either,” the boy said, jeering and confident

“I can!”

“Let’s see you, then.”

“You wouldn’t lend me your bow.”

“Yes, I would. Only I don’t expect you can even bend it.”

“What shall I aim at?”

“We always shoot at that tree-stump by the rock.”

“Where from?”

“About here.”

Hylas’ face lit up as he measured the distance and felt the stiffness of the bow. Without a word he fitted an arrow to the string and let it go.

“Easy,” he said with scorn. The other boys were silent. He felt intuitively that he had done something which they considered difficult, and held out his hand for more arrows. When these, too, quivered in the tree-stump he returned the bow to its owner

"Let's see you do that," he said. The taller boy glanced at him and to the stump. Of his three arrows two just missed and one stuck in the root. Hylas shrugged.

"Call that shooting?" he asked. "Where I come from we'd smack the babies if they couldn't hit that." The bigger boy frowned; Hylas, choosing his moment with some discretion, turned away.

"I've got to go and see my heifer," he said. Nobody tried to stop him. He glanced back once. They were shooting at the stump. Somehow it seemed to him that they were more purposeful than perhaps they might have been. He laughed aloud and started to run.

Later that morning, when Hylas was fetching water for Antippe, Herakles came into the court and sat on the bench. He beckoned to Hylas, who looked right through him and passed on. A moment later he was violently seized and pushed down on to the seat.

"Now look here, young Hylas," Herakles said, "sulking isn't going to do any good. What's past is past; what is to come depends on you. It will be pleasant enough here if you behave yourself."

Hylas regarded the opposite wall stonily. Herakles saw that he wasn't making much impression. He tried to think how Likymnios would have handled the matter.

"Your father was a man, Hylas," he said, "and I'm going to make a man of you."

Still no reply.

"You're not very big yet, but you'll grow. Not very strong, either, but you'll develop."

The boy bit his lip. Herakles, not looking at him, blundered on.

"I'll teach you to shoot, and throw a spear, and run and jump and box. We'll have great times together."

Still silence. Herakles glanced down at the small stern face. Inflexible. Implacable. Stubborn.

"Now look here, Hylas: I'm only going to say this once, because when I say a thing I mean it, then and always. I'm sorry I killed your father. I shouldn't have touched him if he hadn't tried to kill me first."

"He was a lot better than you," the boy burst out.

Herakles nodded. He was making progress. He had provoked the boy to speech, even though the words had been meant as an insult.

"It's right that you should think so," he said, choosing his words with care. "I used to think that my father was the finest man in the world."

"Is he dead, too?"

"Yes."

Hylas smiled; his eyes flashed, and Herakles restrained his hands with difficulty. They were strongly tempted to break the boy's neck and be done with all this. But he remembered his uncle, and persevered.

"He once said something which stuck in my mind. Shall I tell you what it was?"

Hylas remained silent. Herakles waited. Then—

"Perhaps I won't, though. You wouldn't understand."

After a long pause—

"I expect it was something silly," Hylas observed with detachment.

"Oh, no. It wasn't silly."

Again silence. Two white doves settled on the roof and began to preen themselves in the hot sunshine.

"It wasn't as good as what my father told me, anyhow," Hylas said.

"What did your father tell you?"

"I'm not going to say."

"Perhaps it was the same."

"No, it wasn't."

"How do you know?"

"Because my father never said anything silly."

Herakles sat back and laughed. Then he rose and held out his hand.

"Come and see the baby," he invited.

Hylas didn't know what to do about that. His sense told him he would be spared a lot of trouble and unpleasantness if, superficially at least, he fell in with the big man's wishes. Also he very much wanted to see the baby. Like most children, he loved babies when they were very small. But he didn't want

to appear to be giving in, nor do anything that might be taken as responding to an advance.

He stood up.

"Wonder how he'll like it when somebody kills his father," he said. Herakles looked down at him, so small and lonely; and his simple, generous heart smote him almost to tears.

Three

Life in Achaia at that time was peaceful enough. There was little movement of the wandering peoples in the north, nor were the Minyans of Orchomenos likely to give trouble for some time. The Teleboians had long ago moved to the islands off the west coast, and though they were notorious pirates and sent out occasional parties to ravage the coastal villages of the mainland, they kept well clear of the dominions of Eurystheos. Through his vassals the king of Mykenai exerted a strong rule; the scattered cities each kept the surrounding country safe, and unwalled settlements slept securely in their shadow. A man might come and go unharmed, a woman unmolested, from Aitolia in the west to the eastern shores of Boiotia; from Mount Olympos on the Thessalian border to the southern sea.

The Islands, too, paid allegiance to Mykenai. From Korkyra to Kythera in the west; Euboia, Skiathos, Skyros in the east; Andros, Tenos and Mykonos too, they looked to Eurystheos as their king. Naxos and Amorgos in the far south were held by pirates and lawless men; and if Eurystheos claimed them by right, he at least had the discretion not to sail there and say so. An unspoken policy of mutual tolerance existed which it would have been in the interests of neither party to break.

Though Zeus and Hera were worshipped as the national deities, the other gods of the Olympian pantheon had shrines and devotees in various cities. There was talk, too, of nymphs presiding over fountains, rivers and streams; oreads of the hills, dryads of the woods. Hylas, while firmly believing in these, had never seen any, and thought little about them. Time enough, he considered, when one of them crossed his path, for good or evil. He was much more interested in the animals

which preyed and were preyed upon; deer, boar and lion, hunted for food or sport or real necessity.

It was with the idea of training him for the chase that Herakles began to teach him the use of weapons. The first lesson was memorable. Herakles had fashioned a bow suited to Hylas' strength, and led him outside the walls. He showed the boy how to hold the bow, fit the arrow to the string and loose it cleanly. Then he told him to fly a shaft at a tree some twenty paces distant.

Hylas' clumsiness was inconceivable. He held the bow awkwardly and fumbled with the string; when he loosed the arrow it left the bow half sideways, turned over a time or two and fell not more than ten paces away.

"Try another," Herakles said.

The second attempt was just as bad.

"You'll do better this time," said Herakles. He was a false prophet. Never in all the history of the bow had a worse shaft been loosed.

There was a silence. Hylas kicked at a small stone, dangling the bow in an idle hand.

"Come here, Hylas," said Herakles in a queer tone. The boy took a step toward him, avoiding his eye. Then, to his scandalised astonishment, he was picked up, put over Herakles' big knee and soundly spanked. When it was done—

"What's that for?" he demanded, shrill with anger and pain.

"For lying to me, Hylas."

"But I haven't even spoken!"

"No. You haven't spoken. But you've tried to make me believe that you're a fool with a bow. That's every bit as bad as saying so."

"Well, I can't help it if I——"

"Steady, Hylas. Don't make it worse."

The boy fell silent, flushing and uncomfortable. Herakles' face was serious.

"A day or two ago you hit a mark no wider than my two hands five times with five arrows at fifty paces. And with a bow you'd never handled before. Was that an accident?"

Hylas hung his head, but said nothing.

"Who taught you to shoot, Hylas?"

The boy looked up at him, his eyes flashing.
"Who do you think?"

Herakles nodded slowly. "He wouldn't want anybody to believe he had a fool or a liar for a son, would he?"

"I'm not either!"

"No, I don't think you are, Hylas. Go and fetch your arrows and try again."

Hylas went as slowly as he dare, thinking deeply. When he returned—

"That mark is too easy," he said. "Can't I shoot at something else?"

"No. Hit that first."

Almost contemptuously the boy shot his arrows into the tree. Herakles nodded.

"Can you throw a spear, Hylas?"

Their eyes met. There was a short silence. Then—

"A bit," Hylas admitted.

"Good. We'll leave that for another day. Fetch your arrows and we'll find a mark worth shooting at."

As they walked back to the city, Hylas said:

"Who told you about me shooting the other day?"

Herakles' eyes twinkled. "If I tell you that, you'll know as much as I do, won't you?" he replied.

"I expect it was that big boy."

"No, it wasn't that big boy. By the way, do you know who he is?"

"No. I don't very much care."

"He's Menoikios, the son of the king."

"Oh! Well, he can't shoot, anyhow."

"No, but he can run, can't he? And jump. Better than any boy in Thebai. You didn't do badly to keep so close to him, Hylas. One day you're going to beat him, aren't you?"

"Yes."

Hylas was glowering. He hated himself for being proud of Herakles' praise and confidence.

"But it won't be because of you," he added.

Herakles laughed. Dimly he was beginning to see into the dark resentful ways of the boy's mind.

* * *

Although Hylas was compelled to admit that Megara was the loveliest lady he had ever seen, privately he considered that the fuss Herakles made of her when she rose from her childbed was silly. Things were not done that way among the Dryopes. The mothers there brought forth their babies, were tended by the women, and after awhile appeared again to herd the cattle or work in the fields. For a time, perhaps, their men treated them with slightly more consideration until their strength was fully restored; this never took long, and was soon forgotten.

But Megara lay in the sun, laughing at her baby, enjoying her big husband's solicitude and finding the long day none too long, the new pleasure of motherhood inexhaustible. Kreontiades, however, seemed already to have acquired the Theban characteristic of lethargy; his small life was divided between feeding and sleeping. For him, as yet, there was nothing else. So now and again Megara had time to remember the queer, silent, dark-eyed boy of whom her husband talked so much.

She sent for him one afternoon when Herakles had gone hunting with some other men and the baby was asleep. She sat him near her, so that she might see his face; they talked together, idly and at lazy intervals.

“What do you find in him,” she asked her husband, after, “to interest you so?”

“Character,” he replied at once. “More than any two boys in Thebai put together.”

Megara laughed. “Not excepting your son?”

“Apart from gluttony and sloth, he shows no evidence of having any yet.”

“Oh, but you should have seen to-day, how he caught my finger and held it!”

“That's not character,” Herakles said, “that's discrimination.” Megara smiled radiantly at him, and there was no further talk of Hylas for awhile, until Kreon came down to see his daughter and grandson. For some reason Menoikios came with him. After he had been shown the baby——

“Where's that boy?” Menoikios asked of Herakles.

“Hylas? Oh, somewhere about. Go and ask Antippe.”

"Who are you talking about?" Kreon asked; and was told the boy's short history.

"Those Dryopes," he observed. "I've heard of them. Old blood. They've been great in their day, I shouldn't wonder. Not much now, though. Troublesome. Wonder where they'll settle?" He thought for a few moments. "What are you going to do with the boy?"

"He's rather a problem; I don't really know."

"Wonder if they'd recognise him as their king when he comes of age? It goes by heredity, same as with us. Might be worth while training him. Useful people, the Dryopes. Good agriculturalists. There's that valley out by Koronia. Poor soil, but they'd make something of it. Might think of settling them there."

"Eurystheos doesn't want them."

"Oh, Eurystheos! He's a fool. Don't want to take too much notice of him. Herds are all very well, but our people aren't good at crops unless the ground is rich. As it mostly is, of course, except out there. They'd be glad of it, though. Besides, they'd be between us and Orchomenos."

Herakles began to laugh. "You think of everything, don't you?" he observed, not without admiration.

Kreon's shrewd eyes were twinkling. "Somebody must. When I'm gone and you're king of Thebai you'll be glad of a grateful tribe as an outpost."

"Hylas feeling as he does about me, they're far more likely to join in with the Minyans."

Kreon dissented vigorously from that. "In three years he'll be willing to die for you. I know these Dryopes. I'm more concerned about the Koronians. That fellow Athamas——" He paused, shaking a doubtful head. "Not quite right in his mind, if you ask me. Look what he did to that poor girl Nephele."

Megara groaned. "Not again, father," she implored. To Herakles—"I've lost count of the times I've heard that story."

"And now you're going to hear it again," her husband told her with complete lack of feeling, "because I've never been told the rights and wrongs of it by anyone who really knew."

Kreon chuckled. "That's the way to treat them," he murmured with approval. "Well, this girl Nephele—— pretty

youngster : I once had an eye on her myself——”

“Father!”

“Well, you know what young men are. But she married this Athamas soon after he became king of Koronia. They had two children—Phrixos first, then a girl they called Helle—and seemed happy enough until that woman Ino caught his eye. Descended from old Kadmos, she was. Thoroughly bad strain. There’s that fellow Laios who married my sister Iokasta. I don’t know.” He paused, sighed and shook his head.

“Don’t wander, father. You’re telling about Nephele, not Iokasta.”

Kreon and Herakles exchanged an understanding glance.

“Well, somehow this Ino induced him to put Nephele away. Or he may have thought of it himself. He said she had fits of madness. Nonsense. She was a good deal more sane than he was. Even that wasn’t enough for Ino. Athamas married her, of course: she’d had her eye on the throne all along: and when her two children came along she transferred her hate and jealousy to Nephele’s babies. Planned to secure the succession for her own boy. But you’ll never guess how she set about it.”

“No. This happened—how long ago?”

“Twenty years and more; before you were born. Nephele’s father had been a Theban; when Athamas put her away she brought her two children here to Thebai.” He glanced at his daughter and coughed. “That’s how I came to know all this,” he explained.

Herakles nodded, smiling. Megara regarded her father severely.

“You should be ashamed of yourself,” she observed.

“Oh, all perfectly proper, I assure you. Your dear mother saw to that. Besides, Nephele—— However, I expect Herakles knows a few bright eyes that you don’t mind about.”

“I think sometimes that Herakles is a woman-hater.”

Kreon nodded at the sleeping baby. “That looks like it, doesn’t it?” he remarked with a chuckle.

“Oh, I don’t mean me, of course. But—— Go on with your story . . . if you must.”

“Well, when it came to the Time of Sowing, Ino, as queen, had the seed in charge. And believe it or not, she roasted it.

When it was sown, naturally nothing came up. The Koronians—an ignorant, superstitious lot—put it down to their king's treatment of Nephele. That wasn't very pleasant for Ino; the thing looked like falling back on her own head. She tried to convince the people that the sacrifice of Phrixos and Helle would placate the angry deities. But the Koronians wouldn't have that. They liked Nephele, and they didn't like Ino. If there was to be a sacrifice at all, it looked like being her two youngsters. So she had to think again, quickly. I don't know what happened then, but things quietened down and we heard no more of her for quite a while. Until five or six years ago, in fact, when the boy Phrixos was fourteen, his sister a year younger. And then one night they both disappeared."

"He always stops there," Megara explained, "for dramatic effect. You're supposed to be breathless with excitement, and hanging on every word. Are you?"

"What you need," Kreon told her, "and I'm sorry it didn't occur to me when you were younger, is an occasional whacking with a sound thick stick."

"You may safely leave it to me to see that her education is not neglected," Herakles assured him; and his wife made a face at them both. "What became of the two children?"

"They just vanished. Disappeared completely. Never heard of again, from that day to this. Nobody could prove that Ino had been involved; but Athamas must have had his suspicions, or she may have let something slip. Probably she'd been leading him a poor sort of life, and as I say, he's of Kadmeian blood. Anyway, there was a violent quarrel, and one of Ino's children died. I'm not going to say how, because I don't know. But she ran away with the other, Athamas after her. Whether she jumped from the cliff or he threw her over, nobody can tell. But that's how it ended. The child too."

"And Athamas?"

"Took Nephele back. Wisest thing he could have done. She'd never stopped loving him—poor little fool. They say he's asking everywhere for news of the youngsters. Phrixos is of age now, and Athamas has no other heir. But nothing's been heard of him, or the girl either. A melancholy business."

"What's your idea of it?"

"Mine? Oh, I asked a few questions here and there, but no positive result. Except that a Phoinikian ship had been seen lying up at a lonely place on the coast not many hours' march from Thebai. No settlement there. Now, the Phoinikians don't as a rule waste time where there's no profit to be made. And they'll stick at nothing if there's a prospect of enrichment. When all the fuss died down Athamas found that his treasury had been quite considerably depleted. In particular there was a set of armour gone, said to be made all of gold—though what use that would be to anyone is past my comprehension—"

Herakles laughed. "About as much protection as lead, and as heavy."

"Just so. But the Koronians didn't consider that. It was held to have belonged to Ares; I suppose a god of war would be invulnerable anyway, and wear armour merely for show. That would account for its being of gold."

"Worth a good deal, apart from its religious significance."

"And the Phoinikians would know where to find a market for it. Mind you, this is all hypothesis. I've no sort of proof."

Herakles stretched great arms above his head and smiled.

"If Athamas doesn't find his son, perhaps he'd like to adopt Hylas," he suggested.

"I'd wondered. There's something in that boy. Menoikios was telling me. Seems to have taken a liking for him. Strange. He doesn't, often, especially strangers." The keen old eyes glanced at Herakles. "Don't waste him. And don't spoil him. Why not send him up to Chiron for a year or two?"

"Chiron!" Herakles slapped his thigh. "I'd not thought of that."

"I must go. Where's that boy of mine? I'm sending him soon. They might go together. Good for them both."

Four

Except for Herakles, Hylas liked his new home and the people with whom his future life was apparently to be spent. Antippe, though sharp of tongue and instant in the

punishment of delinquency, was at times quite motherly. The two girls, in spite of a tendency to giggle, were pleasant company when they were not too busy to talk. He liked best the little dark one, whose name was Othrya; she, too, was of alien blood, but knew nothing of her history. The other girl, Iope, had been brought from Thrakia when a child; she was fair and pretty, but said little and appeared to think even less. Then there was the lady Megara, laughter-loving and delicately beautiful, whose charm outweighed the stigma attaching to her in Hylas' mind by reason of her relation to Herakles.

His best friend in the household was none of these, however, but a man who lived in a small hut away from the house. To Hylas he seemed immeasurably old; his hair was always untidy, and thick eyebrows gave an expression of deceptive fierceness to his mild eyes. His face was brown with many summers, deeply wrinkled and melancholy; his hands big and strong, with short nails forever broken and grimy. His was the roughest work; hewing wood, handling loads too great for the women's strength, or tasks too dirty or menial for them to undertake if they could depute them to him. He never complained; bent his broad back with resignation, and spent what little was left of the laborious day at the door of his hut, seated on a low stool and shaping things out of wood.

Onemaos, for thus he was called, won Hylas' worship on almost the first day of his introduction to the household. He was sent to fetch Onemaos, and paused before delivering his message, in shyness and in wonder at the skill of the clumsy-looking hands which seemed to put magic into the knife-blade, so that before his eyes the hull of a boat was fashioned in all its complex beauty of curving sides and prow and high uplifted stern. No word was spoken until it was done; then, glancing up beneath fierce eyebrows, the old man growled something and pushed the boat into Hylas' hand. The boy stared incredulously.

"For me?" he gasped. Onemaos nodded, dumb and unsmiling. He was every bit as shy as the boy, and boyishly gratified by the twin compliments of silence and wonder. Hylas could not say all that was rising in his heart; he beamed

upon Onemaos, then turned and ran, to adore in solitude his own most beautiful ship. His message was forgotten. Onemaos shouldered the blame when a wrathful Antippe came seeking him, and the matter passed without Hylas ever learning that a fault, by his forgetfulness, had been imputed to his benefactor.

After that Hylas spent much of his time in the company of the gruff, slow-moving old man, helping him when he could or sitting by him while the white chips curled or sprang from the dextrous knife. Onemaos said little, but Hylas talked enough for both, and the old man soon knew as much of the boy's history as he was able to tell.

"How did you come here?" Hylas asked him one day. Onemaos sat back and looked about him.

"I've always been here," he replied.

"Yes, but I mean before this house was built?"

"I was his father's man, in Tiryns."

"And before that?"

"His father's man."

"Oh! But weren't you ever a little boy?"

"That was a very long time ago."

"Yes, I expect so. Hundreds of years, wasn't it?"

"I shouldn't wonder." If the old eyes twinkled, Hylas saw nothing of it.

"When you were a little boy, did you live here then?"

"Not here, but with his family."

Neither mentioned Herakles by name. They both knew who "he" was.

"But can't you remember before that? Can't you remember your father?"

The old man slowly shook his head. "No. I was very little, I think. Antippe wasn't born then, but there was always somebody like her. And there was always work to do."

That was as far as Hylas could delve into the old man's past. But he drew a moral from it.

If he stayed here, gradually through the far-off years he would become like Onemaos. Old, wrinkled, dirty, careless. With only a single-roomed hut to live in, and that not his own. Worked to his utmost strength; scolded by Antippe, or another like her; laughed at by the girls, or those who took

their place. With nobody to talk to, or care if he lived or died. He might even come to forget his father.

The prospect appalled him. Even such skill as Onemaos had with a knife would be poor consolation for all that.

Bitterly he blamed Herakles for the spear-throwing which had not only robbed him of his father but altered the whole course of his life. His future as he saw it was almost the same as slavery. Perhaps that was what Herakles meant him for; to take the place of Onemaos when he died, as, being so old, he very soon must.

What could he do? He was held by his enemy. His people were gone from the land, he didn't know where. Perhaps they had sailed no farther than the island which spread across the horizon. Perhaps they would come back, seeking him.

He felt no confidence in this. Even to his young understanding it was clear that a small, far from warlike tribe would not dare to land on a coast from which they had been expelled, and battle their way past hostile cities merely to rescue the son of their dead king. For all they knew he, too, might be dead.

He wondered how they would live, robbed of their cattle, and the time of sowing past. They would be compelled to take by stealth or force what they needed if they were not to starve. This would be no new thing, though Theiodamas had forbidden it except in times of extreme necessity. Hylas didn't know if the island was inhabited, if there would be cattle there. His people's need, however, would have been so desperate that they would almost certainly have landed, even if only to hunt what wild things lived there. They might still be upon the island. Why should they sail farther, unless driven off by the inhabitants?

As he thought of their probable course, his mind built up a complete certainty that the Dryopes had in fact remained upon the island. Though their numbers were small by comparison with mainland folk there were enough of them to make a landing, by force if necessary, against the opposition of a few islanders. That, he felt increasingly sure, was what they had done. Even if they hadn't subdued the possessors they would at least have won living space and hunting rights. If this was so, then they were not very far away. A day or two's journey*

through the southward valleys, a few hours on the sea. If one only had a boat, one might come to them.

That was an exciting thought. At first its daring frightened him. Suppose they weren't there, after all? Or suppose he reached the familiar shore and there were no boat? It was unlikely that any had been left behind when the need for everything that would float had been so great; and would he dare venture out in it if one did by chance remain? He had never been in a boat. He knew nothing of oars, or the handling of a sail.

Perhaps though, some of the Dryopes out fishing from their new home on the island would draw close enough inshore to see him if he waved. Surely they would guess who he was. Perhaps—exciting thought—they were watching for him, expecting him, lying a little off day after day in case he came. Perhaps they wouldn't wait for him much longer. Perhaps they were growing tired of looking for someone who never came.

If this were so, then there was no time to lose. He must not disappoint his people. He must go to them as soon as he could be fairly certain of having a few hours' start of pursuit. He must travel fast, avoiding cities and settlements. Asphodel must be left behind. For a long time he tried to think how this could be avoided; he hated leaving the sign of his victory over Herakles in the hands of his enemy. But she wouldn't be hurried; he would be compelled to wait while she took her fill of grass each day. No; Asphodel must be sacrificed if he would win free.

His decision to run away had been arrived at imperceptibly; already he was deep in consideration of practical details. He began by hoarding his supper and such scraps of food as could be come by either honestly or unmissed; enough to last, with care, a full day. He must manage as he could for the rest of his journey.

Almost as soon as the gates were open next morning he drove Asphodel out, as was his usual practice, to the good pasture of the plain. Apart from a few friendly words by the keeper of the gate his going was unremarked, nor did any suspicious eye follow his small figure as he strolled into the shadow of a wood.

Once hidden, however, he changed his pace. With the sure sense of direction peculiar to wandering folk he slipped southward through the wood, only emerging to follow its fringe when he was sure that he could not be seen from the walls of the city.

It had been so easy that he was not greatly excited. Only once, when passing through the gate, had he trembled; magnifying a true appraisal of that perilous passage, he had found it hard to believe that the keeper should not have divined his intention. But no shout had recalled him; no band of pursuers searched the hills. They would not catch him now. He would travel all day near cover, ready to hide at the first alarm. By nightfall he would be far away. The route was familiar to him from two previous passages; his only fear was that he might arrive too late.

Although he was only eleven and slightly built, Hylas had all the tough endurance of the Dryopian breed. It was a small matter to him that he must walk all day, sleep where he could and walk again until he came to the sea. He carried his bow and a few arrows; food enough for the while and a knife which he had begged of Onemaos. When the sun was at its highest he sought the shade, ate and drank and rested, drowsing and thinking how much he hated Herakles.

On again, skirting the valleys where cattle grazed, showing the presence of men. Once, breasting a rise, he passed near to an old shepherd beneath a tree, who stared at him incuriously and blew a note on his reed pipe. That was the only man he saw all day.

Before the sun went down he sought and found a small cave high on the hillside, in which he made a bed of pine branches, piling others in the narrow entrance as a barrier against prowling beasts. He slept soundly and dreamlessly, unafraid of the familiar stars or the dark silence of the mountains. It seemed as if his father's presence, unheard, unseen, but no less positive for that, heartened him and urged him on.

He awoke to renewed strength but acute hunger. He had no more food, and almost wished himself back in Thebai. Only for a moment, until he remembered Herakles.

“He won’t care. He won’t trouble to come after me. He’ll.

be glad to be rid of me. I wish he'd mind. I wish he'd be sorry I'm gone, and want me back. That would serve him right."

The early sun glanced along lonely valleys as the boy began his second day's journey. He went more slowly, obsessed with the need for food. Smoke from a small settlement caught his eye, drew his eager footsteps; a rosy woman smiled at him from the skin-hung doorway of a rude hut. Two fat babies regarded him solemnly, clutching her knees, and a rough-coated dog awaited her word, equally ready to bite or fawn. Hylas paused, shy and irresolute.

"I don't suppose you've any food you don't want?" he said. The woman laughed, and beckoned him inside.

* * *

Hylas was not missed in Thebai until the time of the mid-day meal, for which he usually appeared long before it was due. His absence was so remarkable that Antippe interrupted her busy day to ask news of him; as the afternoon lengthened she took her increasing anxiety to Herakles.

"I expect he's gone to sleep somewhere," Megara said. "He'll come home when he's hungry."

Herakles doubted this; and when he asked and found that Hylas had not been seen in or out of the town since early morning he began to suspect the truth: that Hylas had run away.

"He must have been unhappier than I thought," he said. "I'd believed that he was becoming quite contented."

Kreon wondered if he had lost his way among the hills. Likymnios thought it unlikely.

"People like the Dryopes don't just get lost," he said. "He's gone off somewhere, and he knew where he meant to go before he went. Where's his heifer?"

"They found her grazing with the others, not far off."

Likymnios nodded. "He means to travel fast, then. I don't think he'd do anything without a purpose, and he wouldn't easily leave Asphodel."

"But where would he have gone? He knows nobody outside Thebai."

"No. Except, of course, his own people."

"But they're gone!"

"I know. But he's only a child. He may have some wild fantastic hope that they'll come back, seeking him."

"Surely not! And yet. . . . I don't know. What's best to do?"

Likymnios shrugged. "Either he'll come back, or he won't. Are you very concerned either way?"

Herakles drew a deep breath. "As much as if he were my own son," he replied. "But I've only just realised it."

"Then look for him where we found him first: by the sea."

"You think that's the likeliest place?"

"So much so that I wouldn't bestir myself to look in any other direction, even for you."

Herakles laughed. "No mere uncle has any right to be so infallible," he remarked. "How is it done?"

"Quite simply. By putting oneself into the other's place, and trying to think his thoughts."

"Ah!"

Herakles set out on horseback in the early evening, nine long hours behind the fugitive. At first he saw little to mark the boy's route, but presently came upon signs at the fording of two small rivers which confirmed his uncle's theory. Thereafter he made all haste along the accustomed succession of valleys, asking wherever Hylas might by chance have been seen; learning little from men, nothing from the path the boy had trodden. He slept only when darkness made further search impossible, resuming his journey at the first paling of the stars. An old shepherd sitting near the brow of a hill nodded and spoke of a boy who had slipped past him late on the previous day; some broken pines on a hillside led Herakles to the cave where Hylas had slept.

As he looked down at the improvised bed Herakles felt strangely moved. Clearly to his imagination came a picture of the tired child forgetting his loneliness in sleep, awakening to another lonely day among the uninhabited hills. Never before had Herakles understood so completely the impulses of the boy's unhappy mind. He muttered a mighty vow in that place to cherish Hylas thereafter as his own, and a fervent prayer to the Father of Men that no harm from man or beast should befall the fatherless child in his journeying.

"He had little food; it would have been spent in the first day," Herakles reflected; and, remounting his horse, watched the lower valleys for signs of habitation. A rough-haired dog barked at his approach; two small children ran into a hut, from the doorway of which a rosy woman looked out. . . .

To have earned the gratitude of Herakles of Thebai, it seemed, was no small matter. The woman stared bewildered at the gift he had left her; his words still sang in her mind. She looked from the door of her hut and watched in wonder the swift horse moving through the valley, urged by impatient heels. The dog lay down again in the sunshine, the children resumed their play.

Not until the sun was hanging low over the western hills did Herakles emerge from the pass overlooking the southern sea. Far off an island lay widespread upon the line bounding earth and heaven; in the nearer fields the grass was springing upon crumbled furrows. Down by the shore the idle gulls sat on the broken walls of smoke-blackened, desolate huts. And at the edge of the sea, the only human life in all that solitude, stood the small straight shape of a boy, who watched and waited for a sail that would never come.

Herakles dismounted and tethered his horse.

* * *

Hylas stood by the seashore until the sun went down and the far purple of the island paled to grey before vanishing slowly like smoke in still air.

"They won't come now. It would be dark, and they couldn't see me. Perhaps they couldn't come to-day, because they had to go hunting. Perhaps they'll come to-morrow."

But a cold unhappy voice deep within him whispered that to-morrow, too, would lighten and fade upon an empty sea. There was an ache in his throat as he sighed deeply and turned his face toward a roofless hut in which to pass the night. He realised that he was desperately hungry, tired and chill. A cold wind had risen with the stars, rustling among the long, dry grass; he shivered, and crouched within the shelter of a wall.

Last night he had been uplifted by hope, urgent with haste. Last night his father had seemed to call him to his own people. But now he was suffering the bitterness of disillusion, the defeat

of his hopes. He felt the loneliness of that desolate shore pressing in on him; the 'night was full of strangeness and menace. Unhappily he remembered those who walk in solitude and darkness; grey homeless spirits of the unburied dead, and all those creatures of neither earth nor heaven, neither gods nor men. In the rising wind he sometimes thought he could hear voices, speaking some secret whispering tongue; peering from the shattered doorway he imagined movement, black against the deeper black, as his eyes strained at the shadowed hills. He was familiar with this trick of the darkness; knew that nothing moved; nevertheless an elemental unreasoning fear rose up in him and he began to long for someone reassuringly human to give him comfort.

And all the time his hunger ached like a heavy wound.

He huddled against the windward wall, listening to the fret of the sea, while the stars made a net of thin clear light where once a roof had been; a roof he had begun to know well. He was drowsy, yet afraid to sleep. Passionately he longed for daylight and the vitalising warmth of the sun. Fear, loneliness, hunger and cold were his only companions. These, and the grey dust of his dreams.

He sat up, stiff, alert, watchful. There was a faint glow lightening upon the farther wall; a soft golden radiance, tremulous and flickering, as if a forgotten sunset had thrown a last dying beam across great distances of space. He almost cried out in terror—until his keen ear caught the crackle of burning wood.

He peered cautiously around the edge of the doorway. Not far off a bright fire danced among piles of flaring twigs, crossed upon which lay branches of pine already smoking. A fire which clearly had been made by human hands.

The boy's mind was whirling. Who was it there, so close to him? One, or many? Enemy, or friend? His own people, returned but in hiding? Or others, alien wanderers, here for only a night?

Enemy or friend, many or one, they would have food. If only they fed him, they could do what else they would. He crawled cautiously in the shadow of the hut toward the heartening fire.

"Hallo, Hylas," said Herakles. "Supper won't be long."

With a little sobbing cry, wrought of many inextricable emotions, Hylas rose, rushed forward and flung himself into the ready arms.

Five

The Kentauri who lived about Mount Pelion in Thessaly were said to be of the ancient blood. Back at the beginning of time they had come riding out of the north, to the terror of the primitive people who had never seen horses, and regarded with superstitious awe these men who rode familiarly upon strange beasts. Also the Kentauri were skilled in unknown arts, being wise in herbs and plants potent to cure disease, or kill with certainty. They made their home upon the mountain slopes ; none dared molest them, for they were terrible in war. Even in the days of Eurystheos they had little to do with the people of the Mykenian kingdom, of which territorially they formed part ; by ancient right they were exempt from tribute or service.

It had become the practice of the vassal kings and rulers of lesser towns to segregate their growing sons, placing them in the care of the Kentauri for instruction in the arts of peace and war. There were many advantages in this course, not the least being the warm friendship and mutual respect thus engendered between the future chiefs of the kingdom. This early, easy brotherhood made civil war unlikely, and ensured a confederacy of peoples should the kingdom ever become threatened.

Also the boys in their most impressionable and careless years were kept from entanglements of shining hair, the lure of bright eyes and provocative lips. They were allowed to become men before women made them fools.

Chiron, king of the Kentauri, knew perhaps as much of the ways of youth as any lesser than the gods. He was short, thickly built, slightly bow-legged from much riding; bearded, grave, but with understanding eyes which glinted with quick

laughter. He bent his strangely penetrating gaze upon Hylas and Menoikios while Herakles told him who they were. The two boys were dumb and self-conscious; neither knew exactly what lay before them, except that for the next few years this man would have them in his charge; instruct by showing or telling, praise them or blame, until they were judged fit to take their places among men. Herakles, remembering his own first encounter with those eyes which read so much, held one small hand in each of his.

Menoikios had spoken of little else since his father had first set a date upon his departure for Pelion. He had been excited and talkative upon the journey; in marked contrast to Hylas, who had cloaked an inner apprehension with an assumption of complete indifference. But when the time came for Herakles to leave, both boys looked after him rather wistfully. His going removed their last contact with the world they knew.

Chiron, too, watched him as he strode away.

"There is one who will be a man among men, wherever men may be found," he remarked; the opinion endeared him at once to Menoikios, whose hero Herakles was. Hylas merely shrugged.

The boy could not forget nor overcome his first impression of Herakles. For a moment—of which he hated to be reminded—he had given way by the seashore to relief and the lifting of fear; but with daylight his earlier hatred had returned, and on the journey back to Thebai he had scarcely spoken. He realised with wonder and resentment how gladdened Herakles had been by that impulsive moment; he had thereupon resolved to die rather than yield again. Mistakenly, perhaps, Herakles was keeping in his own heart the plans he had formed for Hylas' future; to the boy his years with Chiron meant only a space untroubled by the daily vexation of seeing and serving the man whom he could never forgive. It never occurred to him that he, as much as Menoikios, was being trained for kingship.

Independently, however, he had set his eyes upon the same objective. The dream had come to him during those hours of vain waiting by the seacoast. Somewhere in the world Dryopes

still lived. In years to come, when he was of age, he would be their rightful king. When that time came he would seek them out and claim his inheritance; he owed it to his dead father that the line of Theiodamas should lead the people who for generations had been subject to his forebears. The years of training under Chiron would be put to good use; the Dryopes should have such a king as they had never followed before. He would make of them a people to be respected, feared even; a people who might come against the men of Thebai in battle, and prevail.

In dreams he pictured the moment when Theiodamas should be avenged; when the slayer of Theiodamas should fall by the hand of Theiodamas' son. . . .

The dream, continually widened and given fantastic depth, carried him through the trying period of his novitiate among boys older and more skilled than he. His days were full, the life hard and simple. Sometimes, seeing the skill shown with weapons by boys little older than himself, he wished he had attended more to Herakles. He made up for it now by applying himself to the management of spear, sword and shield with an intensity of effort which pleased Chiron even while he wondered.

Hylas had one consolation among all this. There was nobody his equal with the bow. Even Chiron admitted that he could teach Hylas little; all that remained was to train his growing strength so as to apply increasing power to the cord, a longer, swifter flight to the already deadly shaft.

Oddly enough Menoikios, the first to suffer from Hylas' precocious skill in archery, exalted it to the other boys, finding no doubt some reflected glory in being the comrade of the young prodigy. He told the story of his first encounter with Hylas until it became wearisome with reiteration. The truth was that Menoikios, son of his father, needed a stronger spirit to lean on in order to show at his best. Hylas, quiet, reserved, indifferent, was the unquestioned leader; Menoikios looked to him for initiative, and offered an affection which Hylas felt quite unimpelled to return. He was slightly contemptuous of Menoikios.

An early boyhood spent among a small people whose

children were few had given Hylas a self-sufficiency beyond his years. It troubled him not at all that he had no intimate friend with whom to share secrets or confide dreams and ambitions. The twenty or so being instructed at that time on the mountain had already divided themselves into twos or threes; there was no place for Hylas in their system of friendships. He and Menoikios were accepted and made welcome as members of the community, but were thrown together until they won their way into other companionships.

So Hylas suffered Menoikios, shared with him and listened to his talk; but never did the son of Kreon suspect even remotely that Hylas had his own dreams of kingship. Nor, perhaps, would any other have penetrated to his most secret heart had not Hylas discovered another following the same high star.

From his first day Hylas had felt strangely drawn to a fair-haired boy three or four years his senior. Tall and straight, with fearless, challenging eyes and a chin firm with resolve, the boy rode and shot and threw his spear with an almost fierce determination to excel. It was clear that he was uplifted by a purpose to which he had devoted his life. He alone of all the older boys had no especial friend, nor seemed to desire one. Hylas had soon perceived the measure of each boy's standing and proficiency; he therefore felt pleased when the grave eyes were turned on him after he had first shown his uncommon skill with the bow.

"You fly a remarkably true shaft; who taught you?" he said.

"My father."

"Ah! You are fortunate. I have not seen my father for seven years."

"I shall never see my father again."

"I'm sorry. Would you rather not speak of it?"

"You wouldn't want to hear."

"Let's go higher, where we can look out over the sea. Where is your friend? Will he mind your leaving him?"

"Menoikios? Oh, no. He's not really my friend. We came here together, that's all."

"You're lucky to know Herakles."

"You won't think so when you hear how my father died."

Hylas had never related the full story of the killing of Theiodamas. He told it now to the silent, thoughtful-looking boy beside him, and all the hate and bitterness in his heart sounded through his words. His companion nodded.

"You must have felt it grievously," he said. "But look at it another way, Hylas. If you had been Herakles, what other would you have done?"

From anyone else such a question would have aroused fury and resentment in Hylas. His admiration and liking for this new friend, however, caused him for the first time to think before he answered slowly :

"He could have made him go down to the boats with the others. He needn't have thrown his spear."

"But would your father have gone thus easily? To my mind that would have been inglorious—cowardly."

Hylas did not reply. He had never looked on it in that way. He didn't agree; but if this boy thought so, there must at least be something worth thinking about in that aspect.

"Herakles might easily have killed all the men and taken the women and children into slavery," the quiet voice went on. "From what you have told me it seems as if he acted with great forbearance. And he hasn't been unkind to you, has he?"

"He gave me a thrashing, once."

"Only once?"

"Why, yes."

"In how long?"

Hylas considered. "Three or four months, I suppose."

"Then you probably deserved it."

But Hylas was much too young to admit this. After a short silence the other went on :

"There are a good many things in Achaia that need setting to rights; things far more unjust and grievous than what you have told me. My father, too, was deprived of his kingship, but wrongfully, by a man who had no right to the throne. Some day I shall see him restored."

His eyes flashed as he spoke; his mouth tightened. Hylas, glancing at his grim, intent face, felt that it would take much to turn him from his purpose; that he would follow his chosen

star, however hard or bitter the road, though it lead him to death. Intuitively he felt the unusual force of the other boy's character; his own responded, and from that moment there was a bond between them.

"My grandfather Kretheos was king of Iolchos by the sea," he told Hylas. "You can see it down there, a little north of the point of the bay. My father was his true son and should have come to the throne when he died. But before she married Kretheos my father's mother had borne by another man twin sons, Neleos and Pelias, who claimed the throne as elder sons of the widowed Queen. They had no proper right, but they were fierce men and strong, and the people of Iolchos cared little for a civil war which would bring them no benefit. One king to them was probably as good as another. So my father was driven from the kingdom.

"But these bad men quarrelled and Neleos, too, was driven away, leaving Pelias to rule alone. My father sent me here to be safe, and I've not seen him since. Sometimes he sends a message, or a gift; I think he's in hiding somewhere among friends, waiting until I am old enough to lead the people of Iolchos against Pelias. The time is not yet, but it will come. It will come."

Hylas felt glad that he was not the false king of Iolchos. This boy Iason looked as if he would have no mercy upon his father's oppressor. He could not quite see, though, how an unknown youth was going to persuade the people of the town to overturn the settled order of things now, when they had failed to do so at the time of the usurpation. It was possible, of course, that Pelias had imperilled by tyranny the kingship he had taken by force. If that were so and the people were ripe for revolt, then Iason would provide the spark which would set passions aflame; Pelias would be consumed and the true king set in his lawful place. But it might not be so. Young as he was, Hylas knew that people revolted less from a sense of abstract justice than in order to mend their own condition.

However Iason fared, it would be interesting to watch the course of his actions and their result, against the day of his own assumption of a like responsibility.

* * *

Herakles missed Hylas more than he had expected. Since that evening on the seashore when the boy had come crying to his arms he had assumed that the old hate had vanished, a new affection been born. Even when, next day, Hylas had behaved much as before, he had attributed the boy's silence to a change of heart and perhaps regret for his earlier dislike. It had seemed impossible that he should have remained unrelenting and unaltered. He regarded Hylas' lack of response as a superficial attempt to keep up the old enmity in order, as is the way of children, to save his own self-love. He smiled, therefore, suffering dark looks and defiant words with equanimity, confident that time would bring about a slow emergence of the boy's feelings from the assumed to the real. Nothing would be gained to him in speeding the process; much might be lost in the attempt. The years with Chiron would give the boy a new, more balanced outlook; he would come to forgive, though he might not forget; and the deep, tender affection which he had inspired in Herakles might then perhaps be returned. It was enough for now that the first beginning of change had been wrought.

Megara was not altogether pleased by the interest her husband took in a boy who to her was little more than a captive slave. She had therefore urged the project of sending him to Chiron, hoping that by the time he was finished there Hylas would be replaced in her husband's heart by his growing son, in whom at this time he seemed to take far too little interest.

In the first few days of the boy's absence, however, Herakles seemed so aimless and gloomy that Megara told him to go to Mykenai and work off some of his depression on Eurystheos. Rather to her vexation Herakles thought this a good idea and wasted no time in setting out. He had felt himself somewhat aggrieved over the apportioning of the Dryopes' cattle among the men of Argos, Mykenai and Thebai, and meant to say so. He had not found an earlier opportunity.

Eurystheos received him with his usual lack of charm. "I have had it in mind to speak to you about that same expedition," he said. "I am told that you failed to render the full tale of your capture."

"Indeed? In what was it lacking?"

“A prisoner.”

Herakles looked surprised.

“Hylas, do you mean?”

“If that is the name of the king’s son, yes.”

“What possible interest can you have in such a child?”

“A slave is always a slave. They tell me that he is an excellent herdsman. You should have left him with me.”

“I didn’t even think of it.”

“I believe you. Your strength lies more in your body than in your head, doesn’t it? Oddly enough, especially when such forgetfulness is to your advantage.”

Herakles regarded the king steadily; a pulse showed in the veins of his neck. But his voice was low and controlled as he replied:

“Some day, Eurystheos, you may envy me the physical strength of which you speak.”

“I think not. You have destroyed lions, I believe, far more powerful than yourself?”

“That is not at all the same.”

“No?” The king of Mykenai smiled unpleasantly. “I, too, have destroyed lions in my time—more strong than you, Herakles. Without moving from my throne.”

“Which,” Herakles retorted, “is the only way you know of killing lions. One day I’ll bring one bound to your palace, and unloose it at your feet. Then you shall give me a demonstration of your methods.”

The mobile face of the king betrayed a momentary uneasiness. Herakles, he knew, was quite capable of carrying out his threat. It would appeal, he felt, to his primitive and quite unsubtle sense of humour. Also it would be remarkably unpleasant for a man more familiar with figures of speech than weapons of the chase. . . .

“Let that be,” he said. “It becomes neither of us to deal in idle threats. Concerning the boy, I do not choose to exert my rightful claim. Touching the cattle, though, it will be hard to make the men of Argos disgorge what has been given them—rightly, to their mind.”

“Surely not so hard for one who has destroyed lions?”

Eurystheos made an impatient gesture. Herakles was so

delighted with this thrust that he at once felt less impelled to insist on his claim. He returned to Thebai with less than he had desired, but in high good humour.

“Sometimes I despair of Eurystheos,” he told Megara. “If only he would lose his temper with me I could forgive him much. And if he would only hit me I think I should love him as a brother. But he is never impulsive. Every word is weighed, the consequences of each act foreseen before he sets it in motion.”

“That,” Megara pointed out, “is why he’s king of Mykenai.”

“He is king of Mykenai for no other reason than that his father was before him.”

“He inherited the throne, certainly; but his own wit has kept him on it, though many would rather see the sceptre in other hands.”

“Whose?”

“Well, yours, perhaps.”

Herakles laughed; but he pondered his wife’s words. Eurystheos was not married—for a good reason, it was said—and sooner or later there would be an empty throne in Mykenai, for which the kings of Argos, Tiryns and Thebai would probably contend. His was the greatest right. But he could not bring himself to court Eurystheos with the idea of being named heir. Half the enjoyment of life came from his perpetual bickering with the king. He usually paid for his laughter—as now, when he had been refused certain cattle to which he had a good claim. He did not realise that the acute Eurystheos counted on this very factor in his dealings with the mighty but simple-souled Theban. Nor, perhaps, would he have greatly cared had it been revealed to him. Herakles had an ungrudging admiration for Eurystheos’ mental abilities, considering such matters, of which he admitted his own lack, to be an essential of kingship. Herakles was almost excessively tolerant. He felt that life and people were too amusing to be taken over-seriously. He had none of that fiery zeal for reformation which, in his view, spoiled many older men. By temperament he would rather fight than sing; but few things seemed to him worthy of becoming heated about.

Also his father had taught him a deep respect for the high office of kingship which he would not lightly abandon.

Kreon's policy of live and let live had undoubtedly helped to shape his simple philosophy. For the rest, his great and growing strength sought constant exercise; he was never so happy as when in action, preferably arduous and sustained. The lesser men of Thebæi were not slow to profit by this unusual trait; few days passed when Herakles was not asked for help in some labour or enterprise beyond their own strength or hardihood.

"You'd fetch a good price as a slave," Megara once told him. It was perhaps characteristic that Herakles regarded this as a high compliment.

* * *

One of the ways in which Herakles compensated himself for the absence of Hylas, finding also an outlet for his restless energy, was in seeking news of the Dryopes.

When Megara protested, Herakles pointed out that her own father had suggested settling the Dryopes near Koronia; that she had spoken of forethought as an attribute of kingship, and that clearly one could not establish a lost tribe anywhere until one had found them. Megara replied that it would be time enough when Hylas was of age; her husband retorted that by then the Dryopes might either be exterminated or have forgotten him. Megara continued to argue, but less and less to the point; Herakles' mind was set, and in the end he had his way.

He sought out Polyphemos of Larissa, a distant relative of his mother, who had often taken him on the sea in his boyhood and filled his small credulous head with strange tales of monsters and men, sea-gods and nereids, to his great wonder and delight. This Polyphemos was a short, red-faced man, deep-chested and deep-voiced, sturdy and powerful; possessing a rare understanding of children, whom he loved, and none at all of women, whom he hated. Herakles suspected that his home life was far from happy; his wife had a shrewish tongue which Polyphemos had neither the wit to answer nor the temerity to subdue. He was quite ready to set out with

Herakles on a voyage which might well keep him from home for months, with an object to which even his wife could take little exception.

Polyphe mos had a boat large enough to sail the seaways of the Islands; he and Herakles between them mustered a score of men to row her and manage the big square sail. Likymnios decided to go with them, in order, as he said, to keep Herakles out of mischief; but privately because he mis-doubted the reception the Dryopes would give to the leader of their previous dispossessors when he came to them again. Even a mission so well-intentioned might easily end in the letting of blood if they were not satisfied about Herakles' good faith.

A few days' journey with oar and sail brought them to the island of Hydreia which lay across the mouth of the bay from which the Dryopes had been expelled. The islanders recalled the passing of the crowded boats, which a freshening wind, however, had blown to the westward.

They followed fact, report and rumour to the Arkadian coast, where certain villagers, still smarting from the loss of a score of cattle, eagerly offered to join the pursuit. Herakles declined, judging it best to keep silent about his benevolent intentions; and, leaving the boat in their care, followed the route taken by the Dryopes through the Arkadian valleys south-westward into Sparta. Tyndareos, the Spartan king, received the party gladly; the Dryopes had passed that way not long before, making apparently for the southern coast. He made it clear that Herakles would earn his deep gratitude by pushing the Dryopes as far as possible from his dominions.

"They are arrant thieves," he asserted. "Land-thieves and cattle-thieves. The earth would be well rid of them."

Herakles stifled his laughter, remembering how he had applied to Theiodamas those same epithets. The facts were unaltered; but it was strange to think how one small boy had changed his view of them. His sympathies now were all with the homeless, unwanted, unhappy Dryopes.

He pressed on.

As they descended the last hill slopes to the Messenian seacoast Herakles' eyes narrowed, and he slipped the bow from his shoulder.

"There seems to be fighting," he observed with deep satisfaction. "I think we'll join in."

"On which side?" Likymnios wanted to know. Herakles was already running.

"I'll tell you when we're nearer," he flung back over his shoulder.

And the small band followed him toward the battle.

The Dryopes were being hard pressed. Outnumbered sadly, they were fighting with desperate courage. With a quick glance Herakles took in the disposition of the combatants; the fighting was scattered and without order, but the Dryopes were spread in a rough line between their attackers and a cluster of huts near the shore. In the centre of the field a group of spearmen were bearing the less skilled Dryopes back; it was clear that they would soon break through, driving a wedge into the thinning line which would sweep down upon the huts.

Herakles halted at a large rock, by which he knelt, a handful of arrows before him; the great bow thrummed, and a man fell. Another, and another; the warriors turned, greatly surprised by this deadly attack from an unseen foe. Even as they hesitated three more of their number fell, kicking and writhing, long arrows drinking their lives; Herakles rose and pointed. Polyphemos yelled to his seamen, Herakles and Likymnios led the men of the land; together the formidable score of war-trained Achaians bore down upon the centre of the battle.

The Dryopes, incredulous at first that anyone in the world should come to their help, nevertheless seized their opportunity and fell on the enemy with renewed ferocity. It was now the turn of the attackers to be attacked. For awhile there were spear-thrusts and sword-cuts in plenty, while the voice of Herakles roared exultation with each mighty blow. He leaped, charged, pursued with fierce alacrity; Polyphemos, silent and crouching, stabbed and thrust with a deadly long knife; Likymnios' spear drank deep, until at last the attackers, exhausted and confused, broke, scattered and ran. . . .

The Dryopes, few of whom were unwounded, gathered about a tall thin man who seemed to be their chief and waited uneasily to see what the newcomers would do next. Even though they had fought the attackers they might have done

so in a private quarrel; the Dryopes were not to know if their turn was now to come.

But Herakles laid aside his sword and approached them smiling and unarmed. Their chief came forward, reassured but diffident still.

"I come in friendship," Herakles said.

"And in good time, lord of battle," the man replied. "I am Melanthios, king of the Dryopes."

"I am Herakles of Thebai. I have been seeking you, bearing news of the son of your dead king Theiodamas."

"Hylas?" the man asked eagerly. "He is my brother's child; we thought him dead."

"He is alive; safe and well. It is concerning him that I wish to speak. But that will wait until a better time. Who are these that attacked you?"

"Men of Pylos, as I believe. There are wounded among them who will tell us."

It proved to be so. Furthermore the group of warriors who had fallen before Herakles' arrows were the king of Pylos and certain of his sons. Herakles thought the matter over and took his uncle aside.

"This Melanthios," he said, "seems well disposed to Hylas. This valley is rich, and there is now no king in Pylos. It is in my mind that the Dryopes might be better here than in the Koronian valley. When the news spreads of to-day's battle they are unlikely to be molested; whereas none but Kreon would welcome them in the kingdom of Mykenai."

Likymnios agreed. "Though in time, of course, the men of Pylos will come to avenge their king," he observed.

"Then we must put upon the throne of Pylos a man who will undertake to keep the peace. The Pylians have no right over this territory; it is far from their city, and unsettled. The Dryopes will not assail Pylos; I will bind Melanthios to that. When Hylas comes of age he will find a thriving and peaceful kingdom awaiting him."

"Will Melanthios give it up, do you think?"

Herakles' mouth tightened; his nostrils quivered.

"Yes," he replied.

Likymnios, glancing at his nephew, thought so too.

Herakles returned to Thebai well pleased with himself. The men who had accompanied him brought back one or two mementoes of their visit to Pylos and considered themselves well paid for their trouble. Even Megara was mollified by a very fine necklace which Herakles brought her from Mykenai. Polyphemos alone was disgruntled. The expedition had not lasted nearly long enough to please him.

Soon after his return Herakles went to see Hylas on the mountain. He had a long talk first with Chiron, who spoke well of the boy; later he saw the youngsters at work.

Hylas and Iason were by now the greatest of friends. This might have been so even had Iason succeeded in matching Hylas' skill with the bow; that he could not, try as he might, certainly added a generous admiration to his instinctive liking for the younger boy. But his spearthrowing and swordplay won a compliment from Herakles, of which he was justly proud. Herakles' name was well known even on Pelion.

Iason looked at a healing wound on Herakles' left arm.

"Have you been fighting?" he asked.

"Oh, there was a small bickering away beyond Sparta."

Iason shivered ecstatically. "Tell me about it," he demanded. So Herakles, not mentioning the Dryopes by name, gave a brief account of the battle.

"And afterwards we went to Pylos," he said. "The people there were dismayed at the death of their king; and as for safety we'd taken with us some of the—the men whom we had helped, the Pylians were frightened of what we might do to them now that their power was broken. We had no trouble with them. We found a young son remaining—a boy called Nestor—so we set him on the throne instead of Neleos, and—"

He was interrupted by a cry of astonishment from Iason.

"Did you say Neleos?"

"Yes. Why?"

"What was his wife's name?"

"Chloris, I think. I spoke to her in Pylos. She——"

"Then you've killed one of the men who turned my father out of the kingship of Iolchos!"

Herakles looked in some surprise at the flushed face and burning eyes of the boy who stood before him.

"Indeed!" he said. "And the present king of Iolchos is——"

"His brother. They were sons of my father's mother by another man. My father was true son of the king."

"And where is your father now?"

"I don't know. But soon I'm going to find him, restore him to his throne and be king after him."

Herakles nodded. "I have heard much of this Pelias," he remarked, "but little to his good. It is time that there was a change in Iolchos. Meanwhile, though, you will be wise to speak little of your intentions. Thrones are not easily upset, and a word to Pelias might wreck your prospects. What is your father's name?"

"Aison the son of Kretheos."

"I will ask among my friends for news of him. This breaking and making of kings, I find, is a pastime which grows on me."

He chanced to glance at Hylas as he spoke; the boy flushed darkly and turned away. Herakles bit his tongue viciously. For the first time he envied Eurystheos his command of thought and word. This light unthinking remark had reopened a wound which he was spending much of his time and care in trying to heal.

He still kept silent, however, about his plans for Hylas, not knowing that this reticence was an even greater mistake than his thoughtless speech. Had he revealed then how he had championed the Dryopes against the men of Pylos, the boy might from that time have felt for him the affection for which he so eagerly craved.

But the moment passed, never to return. And when Herakles departed he left Hylas hoping as never before that he should not see him again.

The town of Iolchos lay at the southern foot of Mount Pelion at the northern extremity of a great, almost land-locked bay, which opened at its southern end into a wide channel between the mainland and the north coast of the isle of Euboea. Herakles, thinking much of Iason's story and the strange ties

of incident and friendship between Hylas and the son of the rightful king, resolved to look at Iolchos on his way back to Thebai.

It was a pleasant little place, lying somewhat back from the sea; the townsmen's boats were beached on a strand at nearby Pagasai. Unrecognised by the people of Iolchos Herakles wandered through the streets and to the seashore, storing much in his memory against the day when he might bring war to Pelias. Young Iason, he reflected, was a likable boy; except for Hylas he had never met one more to his fancy. The fact that he had become Hylas' friend gave him an additional claim on Herakles' liking. A thought came to Herakles; he sat on the edge of a drawn-up boat by the seashore and began to count on his fingers.

"Hylas in Dryopia, as I shall call it: one. Nestor in Pylos, two. Iason in Iolchos, three. Myself in Thebai, four. We might put Menoikios in Koronia if Athamas dies without an heir; that would be five. And Tyndareos of Sparta might be won over; six. I should have a good following if I cared to raise a revolt—which at the moment I don't. But then, neither do I like Eurystheos."

He pondered, turning over many things in his mind. "On the other hand, these outlying places being well disposed to me, and so to the king, are valuable allies. One can never be sure that the Kretans will not at some time come in force, and the northern peoples are always a menace. The day may come when Eurystheos will thank me for my services to the kingdom. That would be a notable day, indeed!"

He suddenly remembered his threat to lay a lion at Eurystheos' feet and spent a few pleasant moments in picturing the scene; laughed aloud, and threw a stone into the sea.

"I've almost a mind to do it," he muttered.

"If it's stealing my boat you have in mind, don't," growled a deep voice from behind him. Herakles looked over his shoulder at fierce blue eyes in a sun-tanned face, and laughed. He rose and faced the speaker.

"Why not? Would you try to stop me?"

The man measured his great bulk and scratched a bearded chin.

"No," he decided. "Not without an army. Where are you from? We don't grow giants in these parts."

"I'm from the south. Are you a native of Iolchos?"

"Well, I was born here, and I've not long since come back to die; but I've been to a good many other places in the years between."

"Ah! Across the seas, perhaps?"

The man nodded shortly. "Ilion, Lykia, Krete. Egypt. Phoinikia, too. I've seen and sailed in some of the ships they build in Sidon. Great ships of thirty oars and more. Proper seamen, the Phoinikians are. Not many places in the world they've not traded with; far beyond the farthest places I've ever been to. You should see some of the queer things they bring back. Figures of gods you've never heard of; cloths and silks and weapons hardly to be believed." He spat in good-humoured disgust. "And these folk in Iolchos think it the centre of the world. If only they could see what I've seen! Why, in Assyria there's a river bigger than Egyptian Nile, and cities so vast that Mykenai could be put into one of their gate-towers. Babylon, for instance. And Assur, and Nineveh. You can't begin to imagine them until you've been there."

Herakles stared out over the sea. He allowed much for exaggeration; nevertheless the man's words inflamed in him an inborn zest for travel and adventure in far places of the earth. He remembered his boyhood, and the tales of Polyphemos. Certainly some of these remote and wonderful places should be worth long journeying to see.

"I've a few trifles I've picked up here and there," the man went on, "if you'd care to see them. I'm getting old now for travelling about, but they bring back the good days when I was young and strong, like you." He regarded Herakles severely. "Why a sizeable young man should be sitting about on other people's boats, throwing stones into the water, when there's so much to see and do in the world, I can't think," he added, with some force.

Herakles rose, stretched and laughed.

"Neither can I," he agreed.

The old man seemed delighted to have an interested listener. He showed his treasures—which impressed Herakles vastly—

giving a brief but vivid account of each and the place of its origin; with particulars, not always creditable, of its acquisition. Among the rest was a thirty-oared galley with a square sail and cabins in the waist and stern. It was beautifully made, every detail a perfect facsimile of the original part, even to the rigging of the mast and the blades of the oars.

"That's how they build them in Sidon. She's a lovely seaboat; I've sailed in her many a time with Malkos the Phoinikian, who owned her. A thorough scoundrel, he was, but we got on well enough. I'd be with him now if I were younger. It's always been my ambition to build a boat like that myself; even bigger, maybe. I know I could do it. But what use would it be? These people daren't voyage far beyond the bay, or down between Euboia and the mainland. A ship like this is for lions, not mice."

"Some day," Herakles said thoughtfully, "I may come and ask you to build a boat like that for me. I'd find the lions to man her."

The old man looked up at him, his keen eyes gleaming with hope.

"Let it be soon," he said. "I'm not growing younger, and when I'm gone you'll find nobody nearer than Sidon to do it for you."

"There's much to be done in Achaia first. But perhaps in three or four years——"

The light died out of the eager face.

"That's a long time. But at least you've given me something to live for. What's your name?"

"Herakles of Thebai."

The man slapped his thigh. "Of course, I should have known. I've only been back a month or so, but I've heard a good deal of you." He looked thoughtful, then chuckled. "I might start looking about for the timber while I'm waiting to hear from you," he remarked. "You'll be back before long, or my name's not Argus."

He seemed reluctant to let his visitor go; Herakles, in no special haste to return home, good-humouredly accepted his invitation to stay overnight. They sat in the doorway of the house set on the hillside, commanding a wide view of moun-

tains, shore and sea. Over a flask of wine from the famous vineyards of Chios Argus told of the places he had seen. He knew intimately towns and cities which to Herakles were no more than names, and seemed more familiar with far-off lands than with Achaia.

“Tiryns I know, and Argos. Mykenai not so well. Your own place, Thebai, hardly at all; I was there only once in my life. And that not long ago. But the lady I wanted to see had moved away, so I didn’t stay.”

Idly—“Anyone I’d be likely to know?” Herakles asked.

“Maybe. Her name was Nephele.”

“I’ve heard her name, but that’s all. If you still want to find her I can tell you where to look.”

“Oh, it’s of no great importance.”

The man’s tone was a shade too casual. Things began to come together in Herakles’ mind. He remembered that Argus had sailed with the Phoinikians. After some thought—

“She once had two children,” he remarked. “They both disappeared, some years ago. Nobody knows how, or what became of them.”

There was a long silence. The two men exchanged glances. Then—

“It’s never safe,” Argus said, “to know too much, nor to tell all you know. A lot of people might be interested in what I might or might not be able to say about that.”

“There’s a reward waiting for anyone who can give Athamas of Koronia news of his son Phrixos. Nephele’s son. He wants him back.”

“I dare say. But he’ll have to go a long way to find him. And he’s safe where he is.”

“Where is he?”

“How should I know?”

Herakles laughed. “I thought perhaps you might have gone to Thebai to tell Nephele that. And I’m not after the reward. If you take my advice you’ll look for her in Koronia; Athamas has taken her back——”

“Where’s that woman Ino, then?”

“Dead, and her children with her.”

“Ah! Good riddance, too. A fury, if ever there was one.”

“What became of the girl—Helle?”

“Oh, she—died.”

“Died? Where?”

“Near Abydos, on the Ilian coast.”

“Did you see her body?”

“N-no. Malkos said she fell overboard. There was a heavy sea running, and——”

“Just so. She was thirteen, and pretty, and—— By the way, there’s a slave market at Abydos, isn’t there? I’m not altogether surprised that she—died.”

“It was nothing to do with me. I was only one of the crew.”

“Well, that story will do for Nephele. But when you tell her, say it as if you mean it. There’s no sense in making her more unhappy than need be. Where is Phrixos?”

After a slight hesitation——

“Have you ever heard of Kolchis? It’s at the far eastern end of the Euxine Sea, at the mouth of the Phasis river.”

“I’ve never heard of it.”

“Well, that’s where he is. We meant to put him off before, but a gale swept us farther east than we’d intended to go. We were stranded on the beach, and the Kolchians took everything we had. Including the boy.”

“And the golden armour?”

Argus glanced at him. “There was something of the sort aboard, I believe. They have a grove sacred to their war-god; they hung it there. And there it still is, I expect. I heard afterwards that the king, Aletes, took a liking for Phrixos and gave him one of his daughters; girl named Chalkiope.”

“How did you learn that?”

“Malkos went back a year or two later to settle his account with the Kolchians.”

“By force?”

“Oh, no. That wasn’t his way at all. By trade. He swindled them out of far more than he’d lost, and carried off a boatload of the natives to sell as slaves into the bargain.”

“He’ll be wise not to go there again.”

“He never goes anywhere twice. There are plenty of fish in the wide seas.”

Herakles was compelled to laugh, though this talk of treachery and false dealing nauseated him.

He returned next day to Thebai.

As soon as Herakles had gone Argus set out for Koronia.

* * *

Kreon listened with deep interest to the story Herakles brought him of the children of Nephele. At the end he shook his head regretfully.

“She had brains as well as beauty,” he remarked. “She was wasted on Athamas. I should have married her myself.”

It took Herakles a long time to realise what he meant.

Seven

Hylas was fifteen years old when Herakles brought him back to Thebai. He found little change in the household, except that a third son had been born to Megara not long before.

Antippe beamed and fussed about him; the two girls Othrya and Iope, who had not seen him since he went away, looked upon him with some awe. This extremely personable young man was very different from the thin, slight child whom they had known. Four years of hard, clean, healthy life on the mountain had given him stature and breadth; not to be compared with the mighty figure of Herakles, of course, but impressive for all that. True that he was slender still, small of bone and compactly made; moved with neatness and an effortless grace, quietly, as the animals move, with a similar suggestion of latent power and lithe speed. But, though little more than a boy, he gave promise of a fine and vigorous manhood.

He had yet to read in the eyes of women that they would find him fair.

Even Megara welcomed him home. Since little Kreontiades had learned to walk and talk Herakles had taken a greater interest in him; her earlier jealousy of Hylas on her son's account had therefore passed away. Deeper knowledge of her husband, too, had convinced her that his feeling for Hylas

was no more than the disinterested, generous affection of a strong and noble nature for one younger and of different physical and mental mould. In finding a place for Hylas among the world of men Herakles would never injure his own son's birthright.

Hylas was flattered and pleased by his reception; he had not thought to find such a genuine, warm-hearted welcome awaiting him. It was clear that his earlier apprehensions were false; he would never become another Onemaos. His place in the household was still undefined—not quite of the family, yet far removed from the servants—but this troubled him not at all. He still had his dream. The time was not far off when he, like his friend Iason, would seek his kingship.

But of this he said nothing to Herakles.

He read in the eyes of Onemaos how pleased was the old man to be remembered; he listened eagerly while Hylas told of his life with Chiron, and of the young Achaians with whom this four years had been spent. When the girl Iope came to summon Onemaos to some belated task they both fell silent, resenting her intrusion.

Since his return Hylas had looked often at Iope, and she at him. She did not return now to the house with Onemaos. Without apparent purpose she lingered, peeping into the empty hut and glancing at Hylas who, seated on the old man's stool, scraped at a piece of wood in idle emulation. He felt unaccountably awkward and unready of tongue with the girl; glanced at her only when he thought she was not looking at him. So long had passed since he had seen her, he told himself, that they were almost strangers.

Yet he knew that this was not the real explanation, for he had fallen at once into the old friendly way with dark-eyed Othrya, as if the years between had been no more than days. But this fair, pale girl Iope troubled him inexplicably, and his puzzlement made him angry and resentful. His gaze bent on the stick he was whittling, he ignored her. And presently she went away.

Hylas looked up then and watched her walk toward the house. Slim and shapely among the flowers, moving with peculiar lightness and grace, she seemed to be drawing his

thoughts with her. He wished that she had stayed longer, spoken to him, given him time to find out why her presence at the same time stimulated and depressed him. But when she fleetingly glanced back he scowled and pored again over his carving. A moment later he was cursing himself for not having smiled, or beckoned her to return.

His own contrary impulses puzzled him as much as the strange disturbance her presence brought to his mind and heart. Why had he suddenly become illogical, doing the opposite of his desire? Why could he not behave naturally, as with Othrya? Iope was only another girl. It was childish to be dumb and awkward in her company. He had never been so when really a child.

Hylas spent a disturbed and restless night, troubled with the vision of Iope's face. He awoke resolved to regard her as she was: a girl of the household whom he had known for nearly five years and never thought much about before. Just a girl, having no place in the future he was planning as king of the Dryopes. He would neither seek nor avoid her; behave as he always had done, with complete freedom from shyness or constraint.

But when he encountered her in the early morning his heart seemed to stop, then race with uncomfortable speed. He felt as if he were choking; the swift blood drummed noisily in his ears. Iope was standing in the court, bright against the shadow of the house; her long unbound hair caught the glory of the low sun and shone with its rising splendour. Her face was shadowed, but she was looking at him, as still as he was raptly still, her slim arms idle at her sides.

And so for a long time there was silence between them.

Then Antippe's voice called shrilly from within the house. The spell was broken, the vision shattered. Hurriedly Iope picked up a vessel of fresh milk and passed into the blackness of an open doorway.

Hylas sat down on a bench feeling strangely weak, as if he had run a great distance; breathless too, and shaken. Yet he felt exultant and invigorated; he wanted to run and shout and sing. Nothing had ever affected him like this before, but the impulse was not to be denied. He went to the place where the

horses were kept and mounted his own—a parting gift from Chiron—for a gallop across the plain.

The morning freshness further intoxicated him; the pony seemed in tune with his mood. Hylas rode easily now, having been soundly taught and well experienced; crouching low over the flying mane, holding with firm knees, he yelled with the joy of life as he flew along the course of the river-valley toward Thespiai, where the herdsmen were driving the cattle out after the milking. He waved to them, shouting lustily, then turned for home. The carefree gallop through the keen bright air reminded him of many such on Pelion. He wondered how Iason, who had shared these rides with him, was faring, and remembered the talk of their last few days together.

Iason, too, had left the mountain, to seek his birthright in Iolchos. Thinking much of his friend, Hylas returned to Thebai in a mood exhilarated yet, but far different from that which had driven him out.

He had completely forgotten Iope. . . .

Herakles was helping some men to build a house on the far side of the town, and had left home for a strenuous day's work when Hylas came in for his morning meal. Hylas played with little Kreontiades until he tired of the child's clamorous importunity; then he went up to the palace for Menoikios. But the young prince was away hunting with some of his father's people, and again Hylas returned to the house of Herakles, feeling somewhat bored.

Othrya was in the court, scouring a milk vessel; she smiled at Hylas and pushed back her dark unruly hair with the back of a damp wrist. Hylas sank down on the bench and watched her. It was strange how thoroughly at ease he could feel with her, though she too was attractive and prettily shaped; talk and laugh with her, yet never feel his pulse stir or quicken at sight or thought of her.

“Where's Iope?” he asked.

“Inside, helping Antippe.” For some reason Othrya laughed and darted a swift, unreadable glance at him.

“Will she be coming out to help you?”

“Probably. Why?”

“Oh, I just wondered.”

Othrya bent over her work. "Antippe is keeping her under her eye," she remarked.

"Why?"

"She's broken two pitchers since you came home."

"Oh! How many does she usually break?"

Othrya sat back on her heels and laughed.

"None. Antippe is rather fierce with people who break things. But Iope seems to be living in a dream lately."

"What's the matter with her?"

"I can't think."

There was a short silence. Then—

"Do you like her?" Hylas asked.

"Who? Antippe?"

"No." Hylas found an unaccountable difficulty in bringing himself to pronounce the girl's name. He flushed, and his voice was husky. "I mean—Iope."

"Oh, well enough. We've been together for so long that we're used to one another. When you work, eat and sleep with anyone as long as that you can't really tell how much you like them. Unless you don't; and then you hate them."

"But you don't hate—her, do you?"

"Oh, no. For people to be deeply loved or hated with passion they have to have some character. If Iope has any I've yet to find it. And I know her as well as anyone."

"She's pretty, though."

"Yes, I suppose she is. Several men in Thebai seem to think so."

"Oh! Who?"

"Nobody of importance, and Antippe keeps them away. It's a poor life for us girls in this house. Apart from the master, who never looks at us, there's only been Onemaos. Until you came home, that is."

"I don't suppose that's made much difference to—to either of you."

Othrya glanced at him, smiling a little.

"Oh, well . . . It's a bit livelier when there's a new face to look at, even if it's only yours. And it gives us something to talk about."

It had not occurred to Hylas that he might be a topic of

conversation between Othrya and Iope. This revelation opened a new line of thought.

"What does she say about me, then?"

"Nothing much. Nothing you'd be interested to hear."

"Perhaps I should."

Othrya laughed, looking at him from beneath dark lashes.

"It's what she doesn't say that's more significant," she remarked.

"Oh!" Hylas was a little confused. Though he wanted to know much more than Othrya seemed ready to disclose, he couldn't very well ask what Iope didn't say about him. And the girl had finished her task; she rose, smiled and went into the house.

Hylas waited for a long time in the empty court in the hope that Iope would appear. Then Herakles came in, roaring for warm bathing water, putting the house in a flurry. So Hylas went to Onemaos and spent a hopeful hour waiting for a repetition of the previous evening's incident. But the old man was not sent for; and the stars came out on Hylas' disappointment.

Several uneasy days passed thus. Sometimes he saw Iope for a few moments; even spoke to her; but Antippe seemed unusually watchful and exacting. He could spend hours with Othrya, who didn't interest him; but it seemed as if Iope were purposely being kept from him.

He fretted, brooded, became silent and sulky. Deep in his heart he laid quite unreasonable blame on Herakles for this frustration. It accorded with everything else; he was thwarted in every desire. Why shouldn't he see and speak to Iope if he wanted to? What harm was there in it? Surely the girl, though a slave, had the right of a little daily freedom? There was no check on Othrya when the sun was low; she could walk in the garden, talk to Onemaos, laugh with Hylas, and nobody minded. What was the difference between her and Iope? Was all this because of two broken pitchers? Was Antippe, then, so vindictive? Or was it in truth because they knew Hylas wanted to see her, and they meant not to let him?

Well, he intended to see her, whatever they did. He was tired of being treated as a child.

One soft warm night he rose from his sleepless bed and went into the garden. It was still and peaceful, scented with flowers. He lay on the cool grass, looking up at the stars and thinking of many things, but mostly of Iope. Deeply he envied Othrya, who lived in such close intimacy with her yet seemed quite unaware of her good fortune. He wondered if Iope liked Othrya; whether she ever wished that Hylas could take her place, if only for an hour. . . .

He sat up impatiently. The still cold stars seemed to mock him with their dispassionate aloofness. The household was long ago silent in sleep; he felt vividly wakeful, restless, dissatisfied. Quietly he walked to the low wing of the house in which he knew the girls slept. Their lamp was dark; he supposed that they, too, were asleep. Were Iope's dreams troubled, he wondered? Or did she, too, look wakefully out at the stars, seeing only a disturbing face?

He became suddenly rigid and alert. Someone had whispered his name.

“Hylas! What are you doing there?”

It was Othrya. It would be, of course. He turned away in disgust and deep, bitter disappointment. Always Othrya; why could it never be Iope? Was even the god of sleep on Herakles' side? He kicked savagely at a flower; swore violently as a sharp stone gashed his foot. . . . As he moved toward the house a light脚步声 followed him; he increased his pace. It quickened, ran, drew close. He turned fiercely.

“Oh, leave me alone!” he snarled. “It's not you I want: it's——”

And then he stopped, dismayed and shaken. For Iope stood near him, looking at him in the moonlight with wide soft eyes and a mouth that drooped with hurt surprise.

“Oh!” he said awkwardly. “I—I thought it was Othrya.” And for awhile he stared at her, strange emotions shaking him, his pulse quickening.

“I—We couldn't sleep,” Iope whispered. “We were coming out when we heard somebody moving. I was frightened, but Othrya thought it might be you.”

“Where is she?”

“She—stayed.”

"Why?"

Iope didn't answer. She was staring at him; her long fingers twisted together. Hylas took a step toward her; the girl caught her breath. . . .

Next moment she was in his arms; and Hylas, who had heard of kissing but never seen it done, felt soft warm lips on his, pressing close and eagerly. Soft warm arms were about his neck, a soft warm body very close to his. As in a dream he felt his mind slipping down into a dark whirlpool of confusion; he was shaken and trembling, timorous yet exultant. He knew, now, what Iope meant to him; knew for the first time that he loved her.

And the high clear moon rode higher through the star-flung night. No zephyr troubled the sleeping flowers, nor hooting owl the bewildered silence between the boy and girl upon whom the cold white stars looked dispassionately down.

* * *

The days which before had seemed so long became now a weary eternity, but with this compensation: that with night came Iope. As surely as sunset she came to him, slipping shyly as a timid bird to his ready arms. Secure in his secret, Hylas could now afford to regard even Herakles with tolerance; his earlier cares and preoccupations seemed of little moment beside this new world of emotion and wonder. His dream of kingship dimmed, unless it were to lay at Iope's feet.

Sometimes Antippe glanced at him curiously as he sat dreaming in the sunshine. He seldom left the house, spending long hours in the court, patient now, smiling at Iope when she appeared, satisfied by her answering look of happiness and understanding. Othrya never hinted at her share in their secret, though it was clearly by her complaisance that their meetings went undiscovered.

And Herakles went on with his house-building; Megara played with her little sons, Antippe watched and scolded, until the moon that had lighted Hylas' first kiss had waned and become dark.

Then Herakles came one morning early into the court and sat by Hylas.

"I've finished with that house," he said. "What have you been doing? Finding things dull, I expect."

Hylas stirred, suppressing a smile.

"Oh, no," he replied.

"I've rather neglected you since you came back; but now that I'm free I'll make amends. We're going on an expedition, you and I."

Hylas glanced up at him in dismay.

"An expedition?"

"Yes. Hunting. We shall be away some days, I expect."

This was a grievous blow. But he could not let Herakles suspect his deep revulsion from the thought of separation from Iope, even for one night. In his anxiety to conceal his reluctance he affected slightly more enthusiasm than Herakles had expected.

"Where shall we be going?"

"To a place called Lampeia. It's a fen in Arkadia, at the foot of the Erymanthos mountains. They tell me that a boar has been giving trouble there; he should provide some good sport."

"When are we leaving?"

"To-day. Now, in fact. There's nothing to keep us."

Hylas had no chance to speak with Iope, nor even with Othrya. After a meal he and Herakles left the town on horseback, Hylas bearing the bows, arrows and hunting spears. As they made their leisurely way through summer-ripe valleys Herakles talked much of the art of hunting, Hylas listening with only half his mind, yet storing what he heard; for Herakles' knowledge of lion, boar and deer was wide and deep.

They halted before sundown at Korinthos, where they were well received; places were few in Achaia in which Herakles' coming was not hailed, his going regretted. Hylas noted this and remembered it. Though fading somewhat, his dislike of Herakles was still strongly alive; but his developing judgment brought him to realise that there must be something in Herakles' character to which he was either blind or unresponsive, that so many liked and even venerated one whom he could only hate.

There had been enough to hear and see during the day to keep Hylas' mind from lingering much with Iope, but after the evening meal, when there was no more to do but sleep, his resentment at being separated from her began to grow. As the darkness deepened he remembered more vividly the happiness he was missing; he was not consoled when Herakles sat beside him beneath a tree.

"Have you ever wondered about the stars, Hylas?" he said, looking up at the moonless sky. "What they are, and why we see them only at night?"

"No," the boy replied, as discouragingly as he could speak; though he uttered a lie.

"I have. Did you know that they, like the moon and sun, move in appointed courses?"

"No."

"I once met a man who had sailed with the Phoinikians. They are great seamen and have studied these things. He told me that, knowing the ways of the stars, they can sail by night as surely as if the sun were lighting their path. That's a wonderful thing, Hylas. But there are many mysteries in the earth and sky set for our guidance by the wise father Zeus. In my small way I have noted among the beasts strange wisdom, exceeding that of men; and gifts according to its kind. The lion, which preys on living flesh, is strong and mighty, but not to be compared for swiftness with the deer, except for short distances. Also it is thick and heavy, the better to bear down its prey; whereas the deer is light and slender. Whoever made the animals, Hylas, gave each its chance of life. The lion's strength is of no avail unless he combines with it cunning, to hide in such manner as to surprise his nimbler prey. The speed of the deer is vain unless he is eternally vigilant, watchful against unseen danger and ready in a moment to fly. Truly it seems to me that whatever god made the beasts and birds and fishes, with all their varying degrees of strength and cunning, had some high purpose, if only we had wit to discern it. Clearly it is not enough to be born strong of body or instant of mind. To our natural gifts we must add such as we learn from life and the exercise of our powers."

Hylas made no comment. He was in no mood for a dis-

course; he wanted to think about Iope. Herakles sat back against the trunk of the pine; his upraised face was earnest and thoughtful.

"It may be, Hylas, that the beasts which we learn to master are our unconscious guides in this; for truly to become such men as those who lived in times past is no light matter, and there is no end to the things we have to learn. Deukalion, who survived the deluge, faced a world unpeopled and was not dismayed. I hold him as a pattern, Hylas; for with all pious reverence to the will of the high gods he set about building a new, better world from the ruins of that which had passed away; and from his sons sprang many notable tribes among the Achaians. He was greatly blessed, it is true, in his wife, Pyrrha of the bright hair; for she gave him courage and companionship and love."

Herakles leaned back on his elbow. Hylas' thoughts came winging back; the dissertation seemed to be on the point of attuning with his own mind.

"It is time we talked of these things, Hylas, for in some not far distant time you will find a girl to love, who perhaps will love you. Then more than at any time you must beware; for women can mar fine men as surely as they can make nonentities great and noble."

Hylas stirred, but said nothing. The quiet voice of Herakles went on——

"It is easy to mistake the first awakening of the body's instincts for the splendour of a lasting love. No fire burns so fiercely as young, sappy pine; none so long and enduring as grown and seasoned oak."

"How may the one be told from the other?"

"It can't, Hylas. That often is the tragedy; for infatuation clouds the judgment, making the false seem true. Not until the fire has spent itself do you see what is left; grey ash, dead and cold, for the idle winds to scatter. It is useless for one who wishes you well to ask if your love will be as deep and true and abiding when the girl you love has lost her beauty. Your mind is too full of soft lips and clinging arms; life holds nothing more than these, and why should you picture their passing? But beauty fades, Hylas, as all lovely things must fade; bright

eyes become dim, fresh cheeks lose their roundness. That man is happy who can love while beauty calls, and love no less when the fire of youth burns low. It is a fine thing, Hylas, to see a man and woman no longer young and comely, for whom all the world lies yet in the other's smile. I pray the Father of Men that such may be your destiny. And," he added, less audibly, "mine also."

His words were perhaps obvious and simple, but his voice was deep with sincerity, and the boy was moved. For awhile there was silence, while a night-wind echoed the sea in high pine-branches. Herakles, too, uttered a sigh.

"Time for bed, Hylas," he said. "We have a full day's journeying before us." He rose, quickly and quietly as always, and pulled Hylas to his feet, smiling at him with eyes honest, loving and gentle.

For a moment the boy felt an unaccountable softening toward Herakles; for a moment he longed to confide in him, tell of his love, ask counsel. But—

"We're not the only people from my house who will sleep in a strange bed to-night," Herakles said. "One of the girls has been becoming tiresome for a long time; I've sent her elsewhere. There will be a new face when we return."

Though a cold ghastly premonition told him her name—

"Which one have you sent away?" Hylas gulped.

"The fair one. Iope."

Eight

No fury had ever shaken Hylas with such violence as the rage which now made his mind a flaming scarlet mist. That he should have been separated from Iope for a few days and nights was agony enough; that he might never see her again was torment unendurable.

He dared not trust himself to speak. Black murder was in his heart; his previous hatred was as nothing to the fire of passionate detestation which now possessed him. Sleep was impossible; he writhed and twisted in torture, impotent, despairing, hopeless.

Othrya must have told, or Antippe suspected. Somewhere

there had been treachery, and Herakles had acted with speed and cunning. This hunting expedition was a pretext, so that Iope's removal might be quiet and unopposed. All this talk had merely been leading to the revelation that he knew of Hylas' love, regarded it as no more than youthful infatuation and had stamped it out. Or so he thought. But Hylas resolved with profound determination not to be so treated. His love was not a matter of mere sense; it was a splendour to irradiate his life, a glory to crown his future kingship. He would seek and find Iope, make her his wife. He would stay no longer in Thebai, where they delighted in thwarting him, keeping him dependent and subservient.

But this time he would be more wary. This time he, too, would plan cunningly, so that there should be no pursuit, capture, ignominious return. Once free he would keep his freedom; lie hidden, as for so long Iason's father had hidden from his enemy Pelias; and, like Aison, come at last into his own. Perhaps Iason, when he had won the kingship of Iolchos, would help him. They together could defy even Herakles.

And such a girl as Iope could not be concealed. Herakles would not consider it necessary to send her beyond the five cities. He would trust in his own dominion over Hylas to keep them apart; perhaps even bring her back when he thought the affair dead. Hylas had friends; somehow, secretly, he would find out where she was living. When the time came he would carry her away, protect her, cherish her, until he and she together were acknowledged by his people, or forever cast out. He would remember Deukalion, and Pyrrha whose hair could have been no brighter than Iope's. Let Herakles do as he pleased; Hylas would prove to him that a noble and enduring love could come as soon to a boy of sixteen as to an older man. His world lay shattered, but he had courage, even of a Deukalion. He, too, would build anew from the ruins; his sons, too, would become famous in Achaia.

Meanwhile he must hide his heart; affect not to care that a slave of the household had been removed; accept with seeming acquiescence his dependence, speak nothing of his hopes and plans. Though shared with only one other beside Iope this secret had been betrayed. He would confide for

the future in nobody, so that none could by indiscretion or treachery reveal to Herakles his inner thought.

He rose next morning dull, lethargic, dispirited.

* * *

They learned from the people of Psophis, a small town on the Erymanthos river, that several attempts had been made against the boar which had come down from the mountain. More than one man had died from wounds inflicted by those terrible tusks; the herdsmen dared not go out alone for fear of being surprised by the animal far from help.

Herakles' eyes lit up as he heard the accounts of those who had seen the boar.

"Here is an enemy worth coming far to meet," he told Hylas. "It is poor sport to match human wit and weapons against spiritless beasts, but this boar is wily and aggressive; there will be honour gained in mastering him."

The fame of Herakles was sufficient incentive for a number of the younger townsmen to offer their help. Of these Herakles chose two whose courage and coolness were well regarded and the four set out on foot for the fen at the foot of the mountain. The men of Psophis led the way to a deep thick wood at the edge of the marsh; this was the boar's retreat, which no man dare enter alone.

They made a circuit of the wood, Herakles noting the ingoing and outcoming tracks, estimating for himself the size of the beast and locating its most familiar paths. Where the footprints led in and out most often he halted and called the party together.

"The wind blows from the wood; he will not easily scent us," he said. "It is my wish to take him alive, for which purpose I have brought with me a strong net such as fishermen use. This we will spread across the path, covering it with leaves. You, Palaimon and Zynthos, will lie hidden on each side, holding the ends of the net. I will venture into the wood and try to draw the boar in pursuit of me, leading him this way. When his feet are in the net you will rise up and turn the edge back over him, drawing it about him so that whichever way he turns he is enmeshed."

The men of Psophis nodded; the snare was cunningly laid. When all was ready—

“What is my part?” Hylas asked.

“You will wait in this thicket with an arrow on the string. From here, as you see, you command a clear view of the path for some threescore paces. It may be that the boar will be too close upon my heels for the net to be drawn about him; or some mischance may imperil Zynthos or Palaimon. If you have to shoot, aim to wound but not to kill him. The life of one of us may depend upon your skill, Hylas, but I have no fear. There is no better archer in all Achaia, nor one with a cooler head.”

Herakles laid a hand upon the boy’s shoulder, smiled and picked up his boar-spear.

“Keep silent and still until the moment comes; then act with vigour and speed,” he said. “I do not know how soon it may be, or how long.”

And he moved quietly into the quiet wood.

Hylas settled himself comfortably but so that he could loose a shaft in an instant; selected an arrow with care and stuck others in the ground before him. He looked along the narrow track from his concealment, breaking off a twig which threatened to spoil his aim by dancing in the light breeze across his line of view. Palaimon and Zynthos were well hidden; no sound nor movement of leafy branches betrayed them. Keenly as he might look, too, he could see nothing of the net.

Hylas had been too well trained by Chiron to relax his vigilance for a moment, though no bird uttered its urgent note of warning, no twig snapped beneath an advancing foot. But his mind, as ever, was upon Iope, and the thing Herakles had done. Almost he wished that the hunter in that sinister wood might be surprised, attacked, slain. . . .

Little chance of that. Herakles was too wary, too well versed in the ways of beasts to be caught; threw too deadly a spear to be overcome. Only something unforeseen, almost inconceivable, could bring about his fall.

His pulse quickened suddenly as he realised how he held in his own hands the chance of Herakles’ death. When he led the boar to the hidden net he would be running along the path

almost straight toward Hylas, a very little deflection of aim would be enough to send the shaft intended for the boar through Herakles' heart; and who could say that it was no accident, but by deliberate intention? It was left to his own judgment to decide whether or not to shoot; he could plead excitement, feign the utmost grief. . . .

His fingers tightened upon the string. Never again, perhaps, would he have such an opportunity of taking his revenge and winning freedom, lifting for ever the thraldom which lay so heavily upon him. None but Herakles had any right to his person or claim upon his allegiance. After the slaying he would hurry north—to Dodona or elsewhere: Iolchos, maybe—and obtain purification. Then he would be free.

Free! He drew a deep breath; his hand trembled slightly. He tested the spring of his bow, measured the strength of the wind. He had never aimed to kill a man; for the first time he felt uncertain of his skill. His arrow might not fly true; might only wound Herakles.

That must not happen. Herakles would know. If he aimed at Herakles he must not fail. At that distance it should be an easy shot.

A sudden flurry and disturbance in the wood, and Herakles' voice; the patter of swift feet and the alarm of rising birds. A swaying of far branches; quick movement half-seen at the curve of the path. Then Herakles appeared, running lightly and easily.

Hylas raised his bow, drew the long arrow to his ear.

Herakles was waving his spear and laughing. Hylas remembered Iope and took careful aim. Then he saw the boar.

It was bigger far than any he had seen, with long, wickedly-curving tusks; it followed close to Herakles—dangerously close—head down, evil eyes aglint. Herakles was on the line of the net; he leaped, and a few leaves rustled as it was tautened.

“Up with it and over him!” Herakles shouted. The net rose with a sudden jerk between him and the boar. But something was wrong; the men had either left it too late or misjudged the force of the animal's impetus. The fierce tusks gored and slashed, ripping the edge of the net, and the boar was through.

Herakles had slowed and turned; he had no time to lift

his spear, for the boar was upon him. He shouted and leaped toward Hylas. The boy's bow thrummed; the keen shaft whistled along the track—to pin the boar along one side from shoulder to flank. The beast faltered, staggered and fell.

Quickly the men of Psophis drew the net over the disabled animal; Herakles aided them and in a short time the boar was helplessly enmeshed.

Hylas sat down, feeling sick and faint, wondering why he had saved the life of the man he had meant to kill.

Herakles came striding to him, hands outstretched, eyes alight.

"Yours the honour of the day, Hylas," he shouted. "A masterly shot, to which I owe my life. It shall not be forgotten. Why, are you faint, or hurt?"

"No. It's—nothing. I suppose I'm cramped from kneeling still so long."

"I've drawn the arrow; I think he will live. Never in my life have I seen such a monster, no one more brave and ferocious. A gift fit for a king, I say. We will take him to Eurystheos."

Herakles was in the highest spirits; his escape from wounding or death troubled him not at all. The men of Psophis, feeling no doubt somewhat blameworthy, were relieved that he had nothing to say of their ineptness, and helped him to carry the boar back to the township.

The tale of Herakles' escape gained in the telling; Hylas found himself praised, admired, made much of. This was a new experience for him and one which he mightily enjoyed. It was clear that the story would spread; his name would be mentioned in places which had never seen him.

Almost, in the warmth of adulation, he forgot Iope.

The boar gave little trouble; he had bled a good deal and lay quietly in the cage made for him by the men of Psophis; when the time came for leaving they put it in an ox-drawn wagon and offered Herakles and Hylas many presents. Herakles declined everything but a thin keen hunting-knife which took his fancy; following his example—for Herakles had whispered that Psophis was far from rich—Hylas accepted no more than a quiver of red leather.

So they rode back to Korinthos, greatly pleased with the result of their expedition.

As they drew near the city Herakles reined in his horse and stared at two tall figures bearing spears and slung shields who strode down the hillside on an almost parallel path.

"I should know those two men," he muttered, "but why they march alone so far from Sparta I cannot conceive." With a word to Hylas he turned his horse to the north. There was a hail and an answering shout; Hylas saw Herakles leap from his horse and put his arms about the shoulders of the two tall men, whom he led to the waiting horses. He seemed greatly excited.

"Wonderful news, Hylas!" he shouted. "There is an expedition afoot!" And he uttered a terrific yell of unbounded joy and eagerness.

The strangers proved to be the twin sons of Tyndareos of Sparta and Leda his bright-haired queen; they had been known to Herakles on Pelion, where Polydeukes had taught him to box. Though not of Herakles' bulk they were mighty men, carrying their weapons with the unconscious ease of familiarity. Kastor, fair as his brother was dark, regarded the caged boar with curious interest.

"But for Hylas here," Herakles told him, "I might by now be dead, or sorely wounded."

After a first glance which had taken in Hylas' youth and comeliness the two men had ignored him, but as Herakles told the tale they looked at him with more respect.

"That was well done," Polydeukes said. "It takes a high courage to face a charging boar, as I know well. This boy, it seems, has proved his manhood; there should be a place for him among us when we put out from Iolchos."

"A place would have been found for him," Herakles observed, "on my word alone, or the ship would have sailed without me."

Herakles and Hylas slept that night at Korinthos and hastened ahead of the two Spartans, who were making for Iolchos on foot. Herakles laughed often to himself as they drew nearer Mykenai; also he seemed deeply solicitous of the boar, which was now able to stand. Curious eyes watched the

unusual procession through the streets of the city to Eurystheos' palace; within the gates Herakles dismounted, threw his bridle to Hylas and stood by the wagon, one hand on the cage. Then he lifted his mighty voice.

"Ho, Eurystheos!" he roared. "Here is a present from the people of Psophis! Deign to receive their tribute!"

Guards came running to seek the reason of his clamour; there were mutterings and stifled laughter as they listened to Herakles' words. Expectantly they stood about him, watching the door; but Eurystheos did not appear.

"Doubtless he is pondering some high matter of state," Herakles gravely observed. "Also it is perhaps not fitting that a king should come to his subject. Therefore the vassal will go to the king."

And to the terror of the onlookers he unbarred the cage, pulling out the boar by front legs and back. With a mighty heave he swung the great but weakened animal to his shoulders and strode into the palace, calling loudly for the king.

Eurystheos, told of his coming, met him in the hall; he was frowning, and a shade paler than usual. He stared at the great tusks and huge bulk of the boar; he was not to know how weak and lethargic it had been made by Hylas' shaft.

"What is this uproar?" he demanded. "Is this a way in which to present yourself? Are you drunk, or mad?"

"Neither. I am merely full of eager expectancy. I have come to learn how such an animal as this may be destroyed from a throne."

Even in his discomfiture Eurystheos could not resist a sarcasm.

"Once again performance falls short of promise," he said. "We spoke, I believe, of lions."

Herakles laughed.

"Thanks to you, O king, there are no lions in Achaia. This poor timid beast is all that is left to demonstrate upon. But it will serve, will it not? Say the word and I will set it at your feet."

Eurystheos made an impatient gesture.

"To mock one less strong than yourself is a form of conceit which does not become a man," he said. "If you are doubtful of my meaning—which I know you are not——"

Herakles interrupted him. "When I came of age I swore loyalty and allegiance to you, Eurystheos," he said in a serious tone. "Now and always I am bondsman of Mykenai; but it is my wish to leave this land for awhile and journey overseas."

"You also? Surely there are enough already in this foolishness."

"Foolish or not, I mean to go."

"And I forbid it."

"Suppose I defy you?"

Eurystheos smiled unpleasantly. "Then," he said, "you may come upon a clearer conception of my meaning when I speak of destroying lions."

"And I," Herakles retorted, "may find it necessary to prove that there is still one lion in Achaia; who will not be so easily caught and brought into your presence as this boar."

"You threaten? You, a vassal?"

"Certainly. My mind is set. Your leave is a mere form. Nevertheless I require it of you for the sake of those I shall leave in Thebai. Come, Eurystheos: my release, or this boar's."

Herakles made a movement as if to set the boar down. Eurystheos drew back; he was unarmed and alone.

"Go, and be damned!" he muttered savagely.

"With your good will?"

"My good will!" Eurystheos laughed bitterly. "I hope never to see your face again."

"And the boar?"

But Eurystheos was in no mood for further talk.

* * *

Herakles was greatly pleased with himself. The disconcerting of Eurystheos and the prospect of adventure to come had raised his spirits to an almost childlike state of excitement. That part of Hylas not obsessed with thoughts of Iope was also eager to reach Iolchos; as much as Herakles he longed to visit unknown lands in company with others of Chiron's training.

They had found in Korinthos many men from the west and south making for Iolchos by way of the isthmus; from them they had learned more than the Spartans had been able to tell. It seemed that the tale had spread through all Achaia of

the golden armour which hung in the sacred grove of Kolchis. None had ever regarded very seriously the Koronians' claim of divine ownership while the armour lay in Athamas' treasury; it was a different matter, and one affecting the honour of Achaia, that armour connected by repute with Ares should lie at the feet of a false Persian god. For dark Aietes looked back to Perseis in the tracing of his lineage; and his people worshipped strange gods at the far end of the dark Euxine Sea.

Also Aietes was rich, and Kolchis lay between east and west. Adventure there would be in plenty along the Mysian coast and the shores of the Euxine. If Aietes made difficulties about the sacred armour, the Achaians would not be loth to bring him war, with the chance of rich plunder if more incentive were needed than the joy of fighting.

"I have the king's leave; one harder I must obtain," Herakles remarked. "My wife will no doubt have a great deal to say."

But he laughed, as if this were of little real moment, and hastened on to Thebai.

Hylas' mind was in some confusion. The violence of his first rage on learning of Iope's removal has lessened, and on the whole he was glad that he had not yielded to the temptation which had assailed him in the thicket. At times he regretted the lost opportunity; more often he glowed at the reputation for courage and skill which his unaccountable change of mind had won for him. This, he considered, was no bad thing, for when the moment came to break from Herakles it would not be so readily suspected that he had done so from hate or enmity. Better for men to believe him staunch and loyal. It was a part that he knew well how to play.

Some day he would kill Herakles. But only in fair fight; only after he had told Herakles all the bitter hate which for so long had been stored in his heart; his father, and now Iope. The debt should be paid in full; but he had years enough before him. There was plenty of time.

They reached Thebai a little before sundown, galloping the last few stadia so as to reach the city before the closing of the gates. They left the horses with some of Herakles' people within the lower wall and made a brief call at the house of Likymnios to see if he meant to join the expedition.

It was almost dark when they reached Herakles' house.

"We shall be starting at dawn," Herakles said. "I'll look out some arrows and a spear or two. Shout for Antippe and have her prepare a meal; I'm ravenously hungry."

At the sound of his voice Antippe appeared unbidden; her face was white with anxiety, or fear. Herakles looked at her in some surprise.

"Herakles—oh, lord Herakles!" she whispered, wringing her hands.

"Why, what is it, Antippe? Have you bad news for me? My wife: is she hurt—ill—dead?"

"No—no. My lord—Herakles, that I nursed as a baby, and played with as a child. . . ."

"What is all this? Where is Megara?"

"She—Oh, I cannot say it. But—Herakles—be merciful! She is young, and—and often lonely."

Antippe was standing between her master and the door of the inner room. Herakles' face was pale and set as he put her aside. She caught his arm.

"Be not hasty; let there be no blood upon your hands——"

"I promise you that. Now let me go."

Herakles stared at the door for a moment, braced himself and strode into the room. There was a muffled cry of alarm, a man's voice; a hush, then a woman's scream. And a long silence. Hylas felt his toes curling; Antippe was crouched in a corner, weeping quietly.

Presently Herakles appeared in the doorway, swaying a little and breathing heavily. He stared strangely at Hylas, as if not seeing him; put a hand to his brow, shaking his head as a dog shakes after swimming.

"I—I've broken a man's neck," he muttered, "and I don't even know who he is." And he laughed, thickly, one hand upon the doorpost. As Antippe, her eyes wide with horror, drew near, Herakles looked at his other hand and held it out to her.

"Clean. No blood on it."

"Is he dead?"

"Yes. He's dead. Who was he?"

"Lykus. An exile, newly returned."

"He would have done better to have stayed away."

"What of—my lady?"

Herakles laughed. It was an ugly sound.

"She may live, for all I care." He straightened, drew a deep breath. "You have my bow, Hylas?"

"Yes."

"Then there's nothing to keep us here."

Antippe uttered a piteous cry.

"You're not going away—now—like this?"

"How else should I go?"

"But—your wife!"

"Wife!" Herakles' mouth twisted. "She may return to her father. Let Kreon judge. I will not look on her again."

"You will not go without a word for your children, at least?"

"They are hers also, are they not?"

"Why, of course!"

"Then how can I be sure that they are mine?"

Antippe shrank back, staring at him with sad, reproachful eyes. Herakles looked about him; shrugged, smiled.

"My release has been won more easily than I expected," he said. "Come, Hylas."

And without a backward glance he strode from the house.

* * *

They went to Likymnios. He asked no questions of Herakles, but set a meal before them; later Hylas whispered what he knew, and Likymnios' face darkened.

Herakles ate little, drank much—he, usually so abstemious. Hylas sat near him, not knowing what to say or do except refill his winecup at a sign. Herakles looked at him often; but until far into the night he spoke only twice.

"They are all the same," he said. "Even the best of them. Remember that, Hylas, and you'll live to thank me." And he laughed shortly, bitterly, and drained his cup.

Later—much later—when he might have been maudlin with drink—

"Do you realise, Hylas, that I've nobody now but you? You love me, Hylas, don't you? You'll never betray me—break my heart?"

Hylas could find nothing to say.

Nine

Never in its history had there been such a convergence of notable men upon the little town of Iolchos by the sea; day by day new faces appeared, tall young men with uplifted heads passed through its streets. The pride of Achaia was assembling upon the beach of Pagasai.

Pelias the king looked upon them and was afraid. He had not thought that the call of an unknown, unproved youth would evoke such a response. He did not know that many who gathered there from west and south had never heard the name of Iason. It was enough for them that at long last there was peril to be met, honour gained, as Achaia sailed against the race of Perseis.

Iason lived as one in a dream. He, too, had been astounded at the instant rally of great and noble names when he sent messengers flying with the summons to high adventure. He had hoped at the most for half a score of his friends from Pelion; as it was, already twoscore were in Iolchos, filling the town with loud talk and eager laughter, though scarcely seven days had passed since he had taken up Pelias' challenge.

Often on the mountainside the boy had dreamed of his first meeting with Pelias; what would be said and done. But never in his imaginings had he expected to find a smiling, acquiescent uncle, a warm and flattering welcome, a respectful deference to his right of kingship. He had been uncertain, therefore, how to meet this subtlety, for such he had suspected it to be; but Pelias had pledged his word before witnesses to yield the throne when Iason came of age. Gradually his gentleness and good humour had won over the boy; Iason decided that Pelias, having outlived his violent youth, was regretting the wrong he had done and was resolved to make amends. Almost he was disappointed at the ease with which his object had been achieved. He had expected to fight; but the giant of his imagining had proved to be no more than a pigmy shadow. He felt mentally overbalanced.

Then Pelias began to speak of honour, and the glory of men of old time. Almost insensibly he aroused Iason's emulation,

making him vividly aware of his own untried youth. His name was unknown, except as his father's son; he had added nothing to it whereby men might remember him. It would be easy enough to mount a throne relinquished by a regent, but there would be no glory in so doing. Should he not prove himself, show Achaia that here was a man of some account to rule in Iolchos?

The seed fell on rich soil. And when at another time Pelias spoke of the golden armour of Koronia, and the shame to Achaia that the panoply of Ares should lie at the feet of a foreign god, Iason flamed suddenly into violent eagerness. Here was a quest that should prove him; here, with the aid of the warrior-god of Achaia, a venture that should bring honour to his name. Though he died in the attempt, he would die worthily; his glory would become Achaia's, and others would follow where he had so honourably led.

Pelias gravely consented to guard the kingdom while Iason journeyed overseas, laughing to himself at the boy's gullibility. Overjoyed at this complaisance Iason sent out his messengers. . . .

Pelias, who had not expected to be troubled further with him after he had sailed from Iolchos, looked on the men of Achaia who answered his call and began to fear that his diplomacy had been at fault. For if Iason returned successful with these mighty comrades at his back, it would be the act of a fool to deny him the throne or procrastinate further. And Pelias was no fool.

It looked as if the days of his kingship were numbered.

Herakles was delighted to find so many friends, so many men of fame and promise, gathered together in Iolchos. He had thrown off his depression, superficially at least, soon after leaving Thebai, remarking to Hylas that no woman was worth a man's full thought.

"They are well enough for an idle hour, Hylas; but woe to the man who gives his heart into their wanton keeping; for their white fingers are talons, their smile a mask covering every imaginable evil. Truly they are right who speak of the Harpies as vultures with women's faces. For the future we will live among men, who understand what honour means."

They found Iason on the seashore, talking to a short, sturdy, red-faced man who greeted Herakles cheerfully.

"Ah, I expected to find Argus near at hand," Herakles said. Iason, flushed with pride and pleasure, gave welcome to Herakles and Hylas.

"I had asked among the people of Iolchos for a boat to carry me to the Ilian coast," he said, "but it seems that we shall need three or even four. Also Argus doubts their seaworthiness beyond the shelter of the mainland should a wind of any force arise."

"My counsel," Argus said, "is to build a ship worthy of the cause in which you sail. A ship of fifty oars, such as they build in Sidon."

Herakles laughed. "I have heard you speak of such a vessel before," he remarked.

"And promised to find those who should man her, if I remember. Well, your lions are here; and long ago I marked the timber for cutting, on the hill slopes beyond the town."

"It is a noble venture, and should be worthily borne. How long will it take to build such a boat as you have in mind?"

"By the earliest days of spring she would be fit to sail; and if you mean to make the passage by water you could leave no sooner in safety, for the winter seas run high and perilous in the Aigaian and Euxine."

"What do you say, Iason? The venture is yours; your word in the matter must prevail."

"Certainly we should come to Kolchis far sooner by sea than overland through unknown countries, as was my first intention. Yet such a ship would be beyond my means; I have no inheritance——"

"You have twoscore eager friends who will hew and cut and shape under my direction," Argus told him. "For the rest, there are women to make your sail, ropemakers in plenty who will think it honour to contribute their share. Speak no more of cost; say the word, and this very day the axe shall ring upon the keel-tree."

Iason, scarcely believing his good fortune, looked eloquently at Argus and Herakles, but could not speak for pride and happiness. Herakles lifted his mighty voice and men came

running at his call. Argus, hastily despatched, came hurrying back with his model of the Phoinikian galley.

"Are we to sail for Kolchis in fishermen's boats, or a ship worthy to bear the honour of Achaia?" Herakles demanded. "Will any among us hold back when there is a man's work to be done, a ship to be built such as Achaia has never seen: a ship which even Sidon will look on with respect?"

There was an answering shout; the young Achaians crowded about Argus, passing the model from hand to eager hand. Herakles, seated on the edge of a boat, looked at Iason and laughed softly.

"I fear that they will not wait your word," he said. "Argus, bring me an axe. Where is this keel-tree of yours?"

* * *

So through the winter days they worked, fashioning such a ship as had never been seen in all the seas about Achaia. At first there was little to show its form; much hard hewing had to be done before the ribs could be shaped and set to the heavy keel. But enthusiasm then was at its highest; strong young men vied with each other to fell and trim and haul the great oaks from the mountain. Then, should spirits flag a little with arduous work still far from completion, there was the spectacle of daily growth. Every night the next day's work was planned by Argus, a task allotted to each man. It was thought shame if the sun went down and found his tale incomplete.

Then the planks were laid to the ribs and shaped to the sweeping curves, firmly held against the utmost power of wind and crashing wave. Decking was laid, higher at stem and stern; rowing benches were set beside the thwarts, and last of all the stout mast securely stepped.

The fame of the great ship spread on flying tongues; skilful craftsmen from many a seacoast place came hurrying north to bear a part in her making. It became a matter for pride in each Achaian town and village that it should have contributed something—of material, however small, of craftsmanship, however humble—to the venture.

Wherever the work was hardest, there was Herakles. Whenever men grew weary or doubtful, then Herakles' mighty

voice shouted encouragement, his brave laughter bred confidence anew. He breathed the fire of his own great spirit into the toiling men; bore two men's share of the labour, and seemed completely happy.

None but Hylas knew how often he sat alone and silent long after his weary comrades were asleep, staring into his winecup, his mouth bitterly awry, his eyes heavy with sombre thoughts. None of those who admired his strength, laughed to his laughter, replied in kind to his badinage, suspected the grief and loneliness which lay buried so deep in his generous, wounded heart. None but Hylas knew how spiritually alone he was among the many who called him friend. More and more he turned to Hylas, never at ease unless the boy were near him; talking, laughing with almost feverish eagerness to evoke an answering smile or word.

It was Herakles' tragedy that he, capable of such deep, unbounded affection, should be unable to arouse in those he loved an equivalent response. Greater in soul as in body than those about him, he repelled by his very greatness that intimacy which exists so much more easily between those not altogether strong.

Hylas suffered him, with always a barrier of reserve which Herakles tried in vain to pierce. Nothing more had been said of Iope; somewhat to Hylas' surprise his firm purpose to find her had weakened as the days passed; but there was that between them, even had Hylas forgotten his father, which could not be forgiven. He felt himself aggrieved by what had been done, and the manner of its doing. That Herakles had been proved right by the rapid fading of his interest in the girl had to his mind no bearing on the matter. Herakles had interfered in a purely private affair, and Hylas considered that he had done so without right. Also he suspected that Herakles had been impelled, in part at least, by possessiveness. He wanted Hylas all to himself; could not bear to share him with anyone, ignoring what Hylas might desire.

Hylas knew very well what many in Iolchos were saying or thinking about Herakles' interest in him; he wondered how anyone with the smallest knowledge of Herakles' nature could come to such an erroneous judgment. For his own sake he

denied the accusation strongly; the fact of its existence spurred him when otherwise he might have flagged. The youngest of those who were to sail against Kolchis, he was resolved that none should say that his place had been won by favour, or any right but his own. Further to prove his manhood he sometimes followed the pattern of the younger men after the day's work was done; for the maids of Iolchos were fair and kind, and Hylas was comely. Also his brief affair with Iope had given him confidence, and more than one merry damsels remembered him with tenderness after he was gone.

He was discreet enough, however, to keep Herakles ignorant of this. Herakles never indulged in such amusements; at the moment, suffering as he was from bitterness and disillusion, he considered all women as less than nothing. They were likely to remain so until one should heal his wounded heart, and return his abounding love in equal measure.

So the winter passed; until with the earliest days of spring the ship that was to bear them to Kolchis stood finished to the last detail on the strand of Pagasai, ready to take the sea.

* * *

The day of their departure was a festival in Iolchos. People came from far places to see the launching of the *Argo*, as they had named the ship. Kreon was there, with Menoikios—the boy vastly envious of Hylas' good fortune in being one of the crew—and Chiron came down from the mountain. He was given a riotous reception by those who were to sail that day, for most of them had spent their years on Pelion.

Kreon and Herakles spoke of Megara. The king laid no blame on Herakles; he asked him to think of his fatherless sons. Herakles shrugged.

"If I return alive from this venture we will talk of the matter again," he said; and with that Kreon was content. He knew his Herakles.

Aison the father of Iason and his wife Alkimede, secure now, had emerged from hiding to give their son a last blessing. Nephele, too, was there; a dark, tall, silent woman with haunted eyes, who took Iason apart and spoke to him long and earnestly. The boy was flushed when he left her; his eyes were

as those of one who has seen a vision; for she had spoken of honour and high resolve in words which burned into his mind and exalted his ardent spirit.

So they sailed from Iolchos, fifty of the bravest men in Achaia, to face the perils of wind and sea and hostile men; some never to return, none knowing what lay before him; but each resolved that not by his default should the bright glory of the venture be dimmed.

And those who were left climbed the hillside slopes, the longer to see the widespread sail and flashing oars of the ship that bore them away; the ship such as had never been built in all Achaia's story, departing on a quest of which no man could foresee the end.

* * *

Hylas' heart was singing. Mightily he heaved at his oar, joying in his strength, proud to be numbered among those whose names would never be forgotten while Achaia lived. The rowers swung to a long, steady rhythm; the oars dipped and flashed and dipped again, while a light wind filled the sail. Dancing water slapped and thumped against the bows; parted, fell back, ran bubbling along the sides. The rigging creaked a little; oars in their thwarts made a dull noise as the blades were lifted from the water and swung forward for another stroke.

Ship-sounds and heart-music blended into a song of praise that ascended to the high place of the gods.

Hylas' bench was in the bow. Opposite, on his left, was Iason; before him sat Polyphemos of Larissa. Herakles had his place amidships, where the biggest men were: Ankaios of Tegea, Kastor and Polydeukes the Spartans, Telamon of Salamis and his brother Peleus. At the raised stern Tiphys, an experienced sailor, handled the great steering oar; by him sat a musician famous through all Achaia, one Orpheos of Thrakia, who sang to the rhythm of the swinging oars, making men forget that they were weary. Argus moved about the ship, his eyes beaming with the pride known only to a man who sees his life's ambition achieved; rejoicing to feel the vessel which his mind had conceived riding so easily the

sunlit waves toward the unknown east, mightily manned, seaworthy, beautiful. He leaned over the stern to examine with an expert air the meeting of the waters cleft by the sharp bows; the out-tapering bow-wave, the wake. . . .

Herakles was happy. Here was strenuous work to do, such as to try even his great strength; he sang with Orpheos as if he had no care in the world. Polyphemos, too, was happy. Every stroke of his blade put a greater distance between him and the tongue that filled Larissa with its lamentations.

As he rowed Hylas glanced from one bare straining back to another, feeling himself at last a man among men. Not since the morning of the day upon which his father had died had he felt so carefree and joyous. His back was toward the course the ship was steering, his eyes were on the mainland slowly sinking into the hard blue line of the sea. Dimly he may have been conscious that more was fading than the mountains of Achaia; that he was leaving behind more than a place here and there that he remembered, a face or two that he knew.

For as the *Argo* sped into the east, impelled by ardent hearts and mighty arms, Hylas sailed from his childhood, with all its dreams and experiences; sailed with soaring hopes into the unknown years of manhood, with all that they might bring of courage or cowardice, fortune or disaster, honour or shame.

One thing alone he carried with him across the dividing sea; one thing remained unalterable in his mind:

His hatred for Herakles.

Ten

Achians were by no means unknown in the land of Ilion. At many places along the west and north coasts there were settlements of those who for various reasons had sought a new home in a foreign land. Some were fugitives from public justice or private feuds; others had been impelled by ambition, preferring to be king of a tiny village rather than a humble citizen of a great city. Some again had migrated simply from love of adventure, seeking some new thing. Ilion accepted

these colonists tolerantly, asking only that they should be seemly in their own affairs and avoid quarrelling with each other or the native peoples.

One of the men who sailed in the *Argo* had an especial interest in these settlers. He was Meleager, son of Oinios king of Kalydon in Aitolia. Less than a year had passed since his brother had sailed away with the intention of making a home somewhere on the northern coast of Ilion. Nothing more had been heard of him, and Meleager asked at every place at which they called for news of young Kyzikos.

They could not tell him at Abydos, though one man remembered that he had put in there months before on his way east. It was not until they reached Perkote, at the mouth of the Praktios river in Dardania, that anything positive was learned. There, however, his name was well known, and for a good reason; Kyzikos was about to marry the daughter of one of the chief citizens. She and her father had left only three days before, bound for the small town which Kyzikos and the friends who had followed him had built.

The Argonauts made all speed with sail and oar to be in time for the wedding. Though Herakles passed bitter observations, at which Polyphemos grinned and nodded assent, he pulled his oar no less vigorously for that. And Orpheos, inspired by this story of young love, sang a new song, speeding the ship over the laughing waters to the great island-mountain lying a little off the mainland shore, at the foot of which their destination lay.

The *Argo* was seen from far off; men and women in holiday mood, gaily dressed and flower-crowned, came down to the beach to greet the travellers. When it became known that among them was a brother of their king, and others well known to them by name and lineage, they were overjoyed. Question tumbled over question before reply could be uttered, and the men of the *Argo* were led into the little town with music and dancing.

Young Kyzikos greeted his brother with joy and pride; the arrival of so many notable men in time to take part in his wedding filled his cup of happiness. Iason, much of an age with him, stretched out his hands in spontaneous friendship—

a gesture to which Kyzikos gladly responded. There was talk and laughter, gossip and badinage; citizens and visitors held high festival together, until Kleite the daughter of Merops of Perkote was led by her father to be wed to the young king.

Kleite was a straight, slender girl, fair haired, with grey eyes and straight brows; her look was disconcertingly penetrating. Though scarcely seventeen she already gave promise of inheriting her father's wisdom—for Merops was a soothsayer of some repute; certainly she had individuality, unquestionably charm. She was made known to Iason and Herakles, and others of the ship's company, greeting them with a dignity and self-possession almost incongruous in one so young and slight.

After the wedding, when Kyzikos and Kleite had been escorted with music and dancing to the bridal bed, there was more feasting. Wine passed freely, and Hylas began to feel comfortably happy. Also a pretty young woman, whose name he had not discovered, appeared to be taking an interest in him that promised well. He was not greatly pleased, therefore, when Herakles beckoned him.

“You will be well advised not to respond too willingly to that charmer's advances,” Herakles said. “All these women are wives, though some of them seem to be in danger of forgetting it. To-night their men are too drunk to care; but they may wake to-morrow in quarrelsome mood. We don't want to soil Kyzikos' nuptials with anyone's blood.”

Reasonable enough; but Hylas was in no mood for reason. Once again Herakles had stepped in and spoiled his pleasure.

“I was doing no harm,” he protested.

“No. But the night is young.”

“And so am I. Am I never to have any amusement without you interfering? I'm old enough to know my own mind——”

“You're just old enough to make a fool of yourself without realising what you're doing.”

“What of it? At least I haven't married a wanton.”

Herakles went white; for a moment Hylas thought that his death was upon him. But he faced the big, grim-faced man fearlessly, though his eyes were sullen, his mouth obstinately drooped.

After a few moments Herakles relaxed.

"True, Hylas," he said; his voice was thick and choking. "True. But you might have done so had I not put it beyond your power."

"Iope was no wanton!"

"You think not? Believe me, you were only the latest of many. It was not only because of you that I sent her away. She was making my house notorious."

"That's a lie!"

Herakles shrugged. "I have never told a lie in my life, even to an enemy," he said. "You cannot believe that I should break my honour merely to soil a memory of yours? Be reasonable, Hylas."

Most men would have met Hylas' words with a blow; nobody else could have used them to Herakles and lived. Inflamed with wine, Hylas saw in this very tolerance an insult. He was being treated as a child; humoured, smiled upon, as if his words had no real meaning and could be ignored, or at least excused and overlooked.

"You have no right to interfere in my affairs. Am I to have no life of my own?"

"Most certainly—when the time comes. You will have years enough in which to commit all the follies you wish—and I fear that they will be many. But not until I have done with you what is in my mind."

"And what is that?"

"The time has not yet come to speak of it. Wait until we have dealt with Aletes and returned to Achaia."

"And until then I am to do nothing without your approval, everything you bid me do?"

Herakles looked at him.

"Yes," he replied.

Hylas shrugged and laughed shortly.

"If you imagine that you can make me——"

"I don't want to make you do anything. I'd rather you saw for yourself that this adventure is an experience and a probation. When it is over your name will be established. It would be a poor thing if some light folly added laughter to men's respect."

Hylas indicated the scene before them.

“What of the others?” he demanded.

“I have no particular interest in the others.”

“I have never asked you to interest yourself in me. I’d much rather you didn’t.”

“Probably. But I’m not consulting your inclinations exclusively, Hylas. I’ve felt responsible for you since the day I killed your father. It’s still my intention to make you such a man as he would have you be.”

“I can become that without your help.”

“You think so. You probably believe it. But I mean to use my own judgment. Let’s not quarrel, Hylas. To you I appear interfering and tedious, I know; but——”

Herakles broke off and sighed. Words never came easily to him; how could he express to this sullen-faced boy the love he bore for him?

“Let’s sleep,” he said. Hylas scowled, but followed him. A sturdy figure hailed them as Polyphe mos of Larissa, rolling like a ship in a beam sea, made toward them.

“Going to bed? So am I,” he announced. “Had enough. Too much, in fact. First time for years.” He chuckled. “Shan’t tell my wife.” After reflection—“If that young fellow Kyzikos only knew! Still, I shouldn’t mind being in his place—to-night, at least.” He roared with sudden laughter. “Wonder if he’d change wives with me? I’ll ask him in the morning. Going to bed now. I’m drunk. Beautifully drunk.” He cocked an eye at Hylas. “I’ll come and help you get married when the time comes,” he said with a leer. “Friend of Herakles is friend of mine. All friends together. Have my wife, if you like.” He laughed again, boisterously. “She’d make you a good queen. She’d keep those damned Dryopes in order. What do you say, Hylas?”

“You’re talking too much, Polyphe mos,” Herakles said with unusual abruptness. His tone quickened Hylas’ interest, already aroused by the man’s words. What did Polyphe mos know of his intention to win the kingship? And why was Herakles trying to stop him talking?

He was too sleepy to pursue the matter in his mind, or he might have arrived at the obvious conclusion. But he awoke

next morning with a full remembrance of the matter, and resolved to ask Polyphe mos what meaning lay in his allusion.

His opportunity came earlier than he had expected.

The town of Kyzikon lay on the mainland, at the end of a strand which at certain times gave foot-passage to the mountain of Dindymon rising from the sea. The island stretched the distance of an hour's march east and west of this narrow, wave-washed neck, forming sheltered harbours in which many a ship could lie safe from wind and sea. The *Argo* was beached in the western haven, on the mainland shore to be safe from falling rocks; for landslides were frequent upon the mountain.

The men of Kyzikon knew nothing of the country to the east. None of the Argonauts had been that way before except Argus, whose memory was clouded with years. Iason therefore decided to climb the mountain in order to survey their further route as far as it could be seen. Though the summit seemed to reach the clouds Kyzikos declared that it could be easily scaled and offered to show the way by paths free from danger. Iason, Herakles, Meleager and some of the younger men set out, taking with them Tiphys the steersman.

Hylas elected to stay behind.

He was looking for Polyphe mos after the departure of the party when a voice hailed him from beside a small house.

“Hylas!”

It was the young woman with whom he had been talking when Herakles called him away. Hylas stopped and walked over to her.

“You didn't tell me your name,” he said.

“You didn't wait to hear it.”

Hylas grinned. “I'm asking for it now,” he told her.

“Why? Does it mean anything to you?”

“One secret for another. What is your name?”

“If I tell you, will you come in and help me make this butter?”

“Indeed I won't. But I'll come in and watch you.”

The girl laughed. “My name is Damia. It's not what I should have chosen for myself, but I suppose it's well enough.”

Hylas seated himself on a stool and admired her shapely arms as they moved deftly about their work.

"It's a pretty name. Almost as pretty as you."

"Oh!" The girl glanced at him in some surprise; she began to wonder if she had misjudged him in thinking him shy and unaccustomed. She didn't know that he was talking at the absent Herakles, defying him. . . .

"Where did you go last night?" she asked. "I looked everywhere for you."

"I went to bed."

The girl laughed. "I've heard more flattering compliments," she remarked. "Why did you go to bed?"

"I was tired."

Damia pouted and tossed her head. "Be honest. Say that you were tired of me; that I bored you."

"Oh, no. But your husband was watching."

"Well, well! And now that he's away——"

"Is he?"

"Yes. I'm all alone here."

"Aha!"

Hands on hips, the girl regarded him with frank amusement.

"That sounds quite grown-up," she observed. "I shall soon begin to wish I hadn't let you in!"

"Not for long," Hylas said; and Damia laughed again.

"Oh, you don't mean that," she said. "I'm not attractive, like the Achaian girls; and nobody looks twice at a married woman. Heigho! I don't know why I ever left Perkote to come and live in a place like this, with a man who thinks more of his cows than of me."

"Perkote? That's where Kleite came from, isn't it?"

"Yes. I knew her well. We lived close to one another. I didn't dream that she'd ever be queen over me. If I'd waited perhaps I might have been queen. As it is——" She shrugged, laughed and threw a provocative glance at Hylas. "As it is, I make butter and cheese, and clean and mend and cook, while my man wanders over the hills with his herd—making love to the mountain nymphs, I shouldn't wonder. A fine life, though a trifle lonely at times. I think I'd rather be a queen."

"Well, Kleite's husband has gone off for the day, too."

"Yes, poor thing! But you men are all alike. I can't think why we women submit to you."

“Come here, then, and let me convince you.”

“I warn you: my husband is big, and strong, and very bad-tempered. . . .

“Bah! So am I. Would you mind very much if I cut off his ears for him?”

Damia laughed joyously; Hylas rose, grinning, and made toward her. She turned and ran toward the inner room. As Hylas passed the door open to the street——

“Ah, young Hylas!” said Polyphemos. Hylas stooped short and scowled at him. The man whom he had set out to seek was the last person he wanted to see now. Damia, too, frowned at him; Polyphemos regarded her with a lecherous eye and grinned widely.

“You two again!” he observed. “Didn’t I see you together last night?”

Damia made a face.

“Not for long. He grew tired of me, and went to bed.”

“Is that what he said?”

“Oh, no. But I don’t need telling.”

“Don’t be too hard on the boy. Perhaps he didn’t want to leave you. Perhaps he had to.”

“Who could have made him?”

“Herakles. The big man. He’s very careful about Hylas. I met them together as I was leaving.”

Damia turned upon Hylas, her eyes scornful and derisive. He didn’t wait for her words; he snapped at Polyphemos——

“Herakles said last night that you were talking too much. Is it a habit of yours?”

Polyphemos nodded gravely.

“Yes,” he admitted. “I believe in saying all I know to everyone I meet. I hate your secretive people, always thinking before they speak. Tell the truth without regard for consequences. Life’s never dull if you do that.”

Damia laughed. “I should think not. It becomes quite exciting at times, doesn’t it?”

Polyphemos chuckled reminiscently. “Leads to surprising results, often. You should try it.”

“Not with my husband. I’m not so fond of excitement as all that.”

"Oho! So you've something to hide, have you? Yes, I'll be bound you have. There's a look in your eye——"

Damia tossed her head.

"It's not meant for you," she remarked.

"No? Ah, well. . . . Shall I see you presently, Hylas—after you've finished explaining why you went to bed last night?"

"I'm coming now."

There was nothing else to do. But the girl looked after him with some resentment as he strode away beside Polyphemos with never a backward glance; she bit her lip as she went back into the house. Polyphemos chuckled.

"That's twice you've been rescued from that siren," he remarked. "Next time there may be nobody at hand. Give her a wide berth, Hylas; she's a bad woman."

"What is it to you or anyone else if she is? By my life, I'm tired of being steered and watched over as if I were a child learning to walk!"

"In a sense that's just what you are," Polyphemos told him bluntly. "A sullen, secretive, surly, vindictive child who should have been beaten a great deal oftener. Unless somebody takes you in hand, and soon, you're going to grow into a very unpleasant man. A worse than Eurystheos—may the gods help us all!"

Hylas choked and fought for breath. Never in his life had he been spoken to with such frankness. Polyphemos glanced at him.

"Herakles is too soft with you," he went on. "You're everything in the world to him, as all men know; and what return do you give him? Frowning looks, curt replies and an aversion you don't try to conceal. If I were in his place I'd knock some decency and respect into your thick head with a club. It might spoil your beauty, but what of that? It would make a man of you, instead of—of a wanton's plaything. What sort of king do you think you'll make?"

"How do you know I'm going to be a king?"

"Oh, everyone knows. Herakles means to put you back with the Dryopes; he's settled them in Messenia in readiness and told them his intention. He thinks you'll be grateful—poor fool!"

"He—he's done that?"

"Yes. Didn't you know? I told him that the first thing you'd

do would be to lead them against Thebai, but he wouldn't listen. But mark this, Hylas: as sure as you lift a hand against him—as I'm convinced you will, some time—I'll tear your liver out with my own hands. I've been wanting to do it for a long time."

"Why not try, here and now?"

"Oh, I could if I wanted to, be sure of that. But then Herakles would want mine, and I can't stand up to him. No, I'm in no hurry. Also, the need may not arise. You've good blood in you, Hylas. It's for you to choose your own way. You'll see in the eyes of men if you're following the right road. The eyes of women show nothing but lies. Keep clear of them until you can tell false from true. And remember this; that whatever you may feel about Herakles, he's worth any ten of the rest of us."

"I know. I sometimes wish that I could like him. But I can't."

"No, for the reason that you're too much obsessed with yourself. You take all and give nothing. You've never had to think or act alone. If ever you do, you'll realise how much his support has meant to you."

This revelation of what Polyphemos thought of him had astounded Hylas too much for his resentment to take violent form. His mind burned and echoed with the old man's words long after they had separated. He wondered how many others thought similarly. He had believed his dislike for Herakles to have been well disguised, yet it seemed patent to Polyphemos. And with what clear insight the old sailor had foreseen what he would do when he came to his kingship! It was humiliating to find his secret thoughts so obvious to a man whom he considered little more than a hard-drinking fool.

Most of all, however, he resented Herakles' intention to restore him to the Dryopes. His dream would be made reality by his own efforts, or not at all; he could not endure to be set upon the throne of his father by his father's slayer.

It was intolerable, too, that everyone should know what had been kept secret from him. Why couldn't they treat him as one of themselves? What did they say of him when his name was mentioned? Did they, perhaps, smile?

He started up, muttering a curse. He would no longer endure this dependence, this servitude and the hidden scorn of those whom he had thought his friends. As soon as he could he would break away, go back to Achaia—Messenia—return to his own people. He would make a name greater than he would have won even had he journeyed on to Kolchis. There would be plenty of opportunities in his own land. Herakles had made his own great name there.

But he would not go yet. Polyphemos would guess the connection between his words and Hylas' disappearance. It must be made to look like an accident. Surely some chance would offer before they had gone beyond places where he could find friends—or at least not enemies.

Meanwhile. . . .

Meanwhile he would try harder to play his part. Knowing now that watchful eyes were upon him he would appear to have taken the words of Polyphemos to heart. He would show Herakles how pleasant he could be; how friendly, solicitous, responsive. . . .

It would hurt Herakles all the more when he was no longer there.

Eleven

A brisk wind was blowing from the south-east when the *Argo* resumed her voyage next morning, filling the sail so that the oars were idle. But after rounding the western point of the island they struck the sail and rowed against a rising sea in the lee of the mountain. The wind freshened as the day advanced, moving more into the east; as they neared the eastern end it blew strongly from ahead.

Tiphys and Argus scanned the sky and conferred together. From the mountain top they had marked a small bay along the distant coast where sheltered anchorage might be found, but unless the wind abated they would hardly make it by nightfall. Herakles, however, scoffed at any thought of putting in sooner.

“Are we men or timid maids, to be daunted by a breath of

wind or the dance of waves?" he demanded. "Lay to it, friends; I will wager the finest cow in my herd that we make the bay before sundown."

Kastor behind him laughed. "Who will take your wager, and then pull his hardest to help you win it?" he asked. "But I do not care to show myself again in a place to which I have said farewell. Lay to it, then; let the wind of these parts learn that it has Achaians to deal with."

The Argonauts laid mighty shoulders to the sweeps; the ship ploughed a pitching way through the darkening sea. The wind flung spray, cold and stinging, upon their backs; whistled in the rigging of the mast, and in the higher air drove ragged clouds across the sky. Tiphys steered a course as close to the shore as he dared; the light was failing quickly and they were still far from their destination.

"It will be a wild night," he said. "We should do well to find safe harbour while we can yet see something of the coast."

But still Herakles demurred. "Fix your eyes upon the headland of the bay, Tiphys," he shouted above the roar of the wind, "and steer for it when you can no longer see. We shall never come to Kolchis if we are to run for shelter whenever we encounter a puff of wind."

"It's clear that you are no seaman," Tiphys grumbled. "What use an hour gained if the ship be lost?"

Nevertheless he kept the ship's bows toward the tumultuous east.

Darkness came down quickly; great banks of cloud hid the stars and the wind rose to a gale. Tiphys, Argus and Idmon spoke together in the high stern, watching white-capped waves riding splendidly past and peering at the black shape of the land.

"It would be foolishness to go farther," Tiphys growled. "I shall drop anchor as soon as I can. We will say nothing of it to those who are clearly more familiar with weapons than with wind and sea."

Slowly he edged the *Argo* landward, seeking a space between the dimly-seen fountains of spray where great waves dashed furiously against unyielding rock. He shook the salt from his eyes and stared again.

"By the beard of Poseidon, it is time we thought of anchoring," he said to Argus. "Look! We are making no way; rather are we being borne back."

It was true enough. The men at the oars were weary, and the gale was stronger with the falling of night; little by little the ship was yielding to the wind. Argus glanced at Tiphys and shrugged.

"That seems to settle the matter," he said. "What is your counsel? To run before it?"

"There is nothing else to do."

"It will be no light matter to turn across the wind."

"I have been in smaller ships, against greater storms. Go forward with the sounding-line, and watch for a point in the lee of which we may cast anchor."

The men at the oars were silent now and all oblivious of land and sea, knowing only that they must pull and pull again at the oars that had grown so heavy until the word was passed to stop. Only by the wind upon their faces could they tell that the course had changed; but Tiphys offered no explanation, nor would his words have been heard beyond the nearest benches. He peered through the darkness, growing moment by moment more anxious as he watched for signs of a haven; listening for a shout from Argus that would tell of shallowing water. But the ship drove on, the night deepened and the bitter wind howled and raged.

At last a shout from the bows; he leaned heavily upon the great steering-oar yelling orders to the rowers. Slowly the ship turned landward and half into the wind; slowly edged into a wide space whence showed the faint gleam of level land untroubled by dashing waves. Again Argus shouted; with a mighty splash the anchor-stones went down. A few moments of anxious waiting; then Tiphys breathed again. The anchors were holding; the ship was safe.

"Prettily managed," Argus said, returning from the bows. "I wonder where we are?"

"Above water," Tiphys grunted. "That is enough for me."

Oars were shipped and laid along the benches; the crew poured over the side and, chest-deep in chilling water, staggered to the beach and into the shelter of a rocky cliff.

"Will the clouds lift," Iason asked Tiphys, "or must we await the dawn to see what place this is?"

"The wind seems to be rising still. We shall see no stars to-night."

"We should keep careful watch. Kyzikos spoke of wild tribes who are said to live to the east; it may be that we have landed upon their shores."

"It is possible; though they would hardly be moving on such a night as this."

Nevertheless a ring of outposts peered through the darkness as men gathered dry wood for a fire. In the shelter of a deep, windless cleft Idmon struck tinder and lit a torch; the smoky glare was comforting in that black torrent of wind. The Argonauts closed about it—a ring of weary faces upon which the glow flickered redly, seeming to deepen the impenetrable dark beyond. Food and wine were passed from the ship; more torches were lit and boughs piled for a fire.

But suddenly a shout from the watchers started them up reaching for ready weapons; men came running back from the outer ring, pointing to the north, and in the glow of many torches faces were seen which were not of the Argonauts; fierce, warlike faces and the glint of arms.

And then the fight began. No parley was asked; each man faced and strove with the enemy nearest him, until the beach was loud with the clash of metal, the dull thud of blows; shouts and hoarse cries of men striking at dimly-seen foes; while the wind and raging sea fought their own eternal battle careless of the wars of men.

Herakles roared and smote, a furious giant of destruction, seeming greater, monstrous in the faint uncertain light. Iason, whose first battle this was, fought with coolness and deliberation, meeting the impetuous rush of his first assailant with a grounded spear upon which the man impaled himself. Thereafter he used his sword, moving little, wary and instant, as if war had long been his trade.

Hylas was almost choking with excitement. At the first alarm he had taken his place by Herakles; to his disgust he found himself shaking uncontrollably, though not from fear. Rather was he exhilarated, eager to match his trained skill

against these wild-looking men, barbarian tribesmen probably; a strange emotion tingled in him so that he wanted to rush upon them shouting, striking blindly. But against this Chiron had warned him, and Herakles too; he held himself in, therefore, and watched and waited, defensive yet ready to strike in an instant.

The long arm of Herakles, however, reached whoever came near before any spear could be levelled against Hylas; the boy glanced left and right, seeking a foe to engage. He had not to look far. Close by him Polyphemos was struggling in the grip of a big, dark-bearded man; the arduous day and his long tale of years had sapped his strength. The big man threw him to the ground, stood back and lifted a club. Hylas leaped forward; his heart was racing but his arm steady as he poised his spear and threw with the quickness of leaping flame. The big man staggered, flung out an arm and toppled over.

Hylas was slightly aghast. He had killed a man; and the first experience, in however hot blood, is not one easily to be brushed aside. But there was no time to analyse his emotions; the battle still raged furiously about him. The man he had killed rolled slowly over; Hylas stooped to wrench his spear from the bloody chest—and uttered a cry. Polyphemos, shaken and panting, rose slowly.

“Thanks, Hylas,” he gasped. “Why, what is it? Have you never seen a dead man before?”

“I’ve seen this man before,” Hylas told him.

“Where?”

“He’s Damia’s husband!”

“Damia? Who—Oh, that woman! Are you sure?”

“Quite sure. I wonder how he comes here?”

Polyphemos uttered an exclamation and leaped into the battle.

“Iason! Herakles!” he bellowed. “Stop, in the name of Zeus! These are the men of Kyzikon!”

* * *

Never had there been a more unhappy dawn. Kyzikos lay dead, his breast shattered by Iason’s spear. About him lay a score of those from whom the Argonauts had parted in friend-

ship a night and a day before. Ever on the watch for marauding Pelasgians who periodically raided their coasts, the Kyzikans had mistaken the torches of the Argonauts for those of their only enemies, never dreaming that their friends had been blown by the gale almost the length of the eastern haven between Dindymon and the mainland. The battle had been fought almost within daytime sight of the little town, so far the wind had driven them.

That was a painful returning. Downcast and with dejected looks the men of the *Argo* carried the slain back to the town. Anxiously the women with whom they had laughed and feasted peered through the ghostly light at their burdens, those who were bereft making great moan, crying against the gods that this grief had befallen them at the hands of their unknowing friends.

“Who is to tell Kleite?” Iason muttered to Herakles.

“She will know soon enough; bad news has wings,” he replied. And as they looked up there was the young bride, a hand at her throat, staring down with dilating eyes at her husband of a day. Slowly she raised her head and looked at Iason. He lowered his gaze; he, whose spirit would yield to no man, could not face the reproach he foresaw in her lovely eyes.

When he looked again she was gone.

There was a sudden movement among the women, and a shrill scream. Damia had found her husband. Wildly she spoke to him, as if the torrent of her words could bring back the life to that cold, still body. When at last she realised that he would speak no more she straightened and looked about her with blazing eyes.

“Who killed him?” she demanded.

Hylas, dumb and unhappy, raised his eyes to hers. She stared at him incredulously.

“You?” she breathed. “You?”

Hylas nodded. The girl’s hands were clenched, the knuckles showing white; she drew a deep breath and her mouth became a thin, hard line. Then suddenly, with a little gasping sob, she turned and forced her way through silent women.

“Damia! Listen to me! I didn’t know him until it was too late!”

But only a despairing cry answered him as Damia ran blindly back to her lonely house.

* * *

For three days and nights the Argonauts were weather-bound in Kyzikon. Then it was that Merops, the soothsayer of Perkote, showed that his wisdom lay as much in practical affairs as in the dim worlds of futurity. Patiently, unobtrusively he smoothed away the resentment of the Kyzikans; little by little he lifted the gloom from the Achaians' hearts. His daughter, too, by her example led the widowed women from despair to resignation, even hope; for she moved among them tearless and uncomplaining, arranging for their immediate needs and planning their return, if they wished, to the homes from which they had come so happily as brides to the young Aitolians. She was gracious to Iason; no word of reproach was uttered for the part he had played in her bereavement, nor was a veil of reserve drawn beyond the clear candour of her eyes.

The kingship of Kyzikon had to be settled. Merops called a council of Meleager, the dead king's elder brother, Iason, Herakles and some of the remaining young men of the town. Few of these had heart to advance a claim, for most of their bravest had fallen in that tragic encounter on the seashore. Meleager, had he desired it, might have won the crown; certain men of Kyzikon, indeed, begged him to abandon the quest and lead them; but his ambition looked to greater heights than these. He put forward the name of one Temisso, whom he had known in Kalydon, a man of strength and courage well fitted to rule the little community. There was no demur; and so the matter was settled.

Temisso was married; there seemed some difficulty about Kleite's position until Merops announced that by her wish and his own she was returning to Perkote with him as soon as her husband's funeral rites had been celebrated. Though her charm and beauty had already won for her the love of the Kyzikans they agreed that this was the best solution.

The last solemn rites were given by the Kyzikans and Argonauts together; the wind began to abate and with heavy

hearts the adventurers prepared their ship for further journeying. Before the last farewells were said Iason went to Kleite's house; they spoke long and earnestly together; but he said nothing to his friends of what had passed between them.

Except for an occasional distant glimpse Hylas saw no more of Damia. She was deeply affected by her husband's death, of that he was sure; but he was puzzled by the contradiction between her bitterness on the morning when he had sat in her house and the grief she had displayed beside her husband's corpse. How could a woman in love have spoken so disparagingly of the man to whom her heart was given?

Polyphemos supplied the answer. As if to atone for his forceful impeachment on that same occasion he was showing a new friendliness to Hylas, who he declared had saved his life.

"She loved him more than he loved her," Polyphemos said. "She was jealous, for he was preoccupied with other things; to him, as is often the way, his wife was an incident in his life. But although living he brought her little comfort she could not bear to know him dead. It is the way of women."

"But if she loved him, why should she want to be faithless when he was away?"

Polyphemos shrugged.

"That also is the way of women," he replied. "Perhaps to spite him—though she would be careful that he knew nothing of it. Perhaps in idle folly. Who can tell the workings of a woman's mind? Not I; and in my sixty years I have known many."

As they rowed between the mountain and the mainland on their way to the open sea the Argonauts looked with sorrow back upon the pleasant little town.

"I grieve for Kleite," Iason said to Hylas. "Her father prophesied at her birth that she was born to be a queen. He has never wavered from that inspired belief. Well, his vision was true; but . . ."

He turned his face away and pulled more strongly at his oar.

"Better for her had I never been born," he muttered, so low that Hylas scarcely heard. "Poor girl! Poor Kleite!"

* * *

The gale had dropped suddenly, though the seas still ran high. Little more than a breeze remained of it, blowing from the south-east. Strengthened by their three days' idleness and perhaps not unwilling to leave Kyzikon and its tragedy far behind, the Argonauts rowed hard and long, stopping only when they must for food and drink. As the day lengthened the depression rose from their spirits; talk passed from bench to bench and laughter was heard again. The wind shifted into the south-west; the sail was hoisted then, and by evening they had passed beyond the farthest limit of their survey from the mountain top.

They had seen no sign of human habitation along that lonely coast; no sail had stood against the sky, and only the white gulls' scream echoed mournfully from the tall wooded cliffs. As the sun made liquid gold of their wake Tiphys looked ahead for an anchorage where fresh water might be found, while Orpheos sang and the tiring men took up the lilt of his song.

A friendly dispute had arisen amidships between Herakles and Ankaios of Tegea, whose thwart was alongside his. This Ankaios was a rough-voiced man with black hair and beard and a roaring laugh; among all the crew he alone rivalled Herakles in physical power. It was an obsession with him to match Herakles in any feat of strength or endurance; he was delighted by success, good humoured in defeat. It seemed that now he had offered a challenge which Herakles had accepted, and every oar was lifted clear while these two alone urged the *Argo* through the waves, each trying to strike such a rate as would compel the other to cry enough.

For awhile the way on the ship made their task relatively light; but with sunset the wind had fallen away and the sail hung lifeless, so that the *Argo* slowed and their great bodies heaved and strained to the bending oars. Wagers were made; banter and encouragement flashed along the idle benches, calling breathless laughter from the sweating men.

The end came suddenly and in an unexpected way; in mid-stroke Herakles' oar split and broke, so that he tumbled heavily back on to the knees of the astonished Kastor. A great shout of laughter greeted him as he rose rubbing his back, a

rueful grin on his streaked face. At once a clamour arose, some claiming that he had lost the wager, others that the contrary view prevailed.

"Let Ankaios break his oar also, and we will cry quits," Herakles said amid laughter. "Otherwise the challenge stands until I have fashioned a new blade."

Ankaios had no wish to profit by his rival's mischance, and the ship's bows were turned for the shore where a wooded slope ran down to the sea beneath the shadow of a range of lofty mountains extending far inland. Herakles left his bench and moved to the bow; impatient of inactivity he was already looking for a likely tree. As soon as the great anchor-stones were dropped he was overboard, axe in hand, striding through waist-deep water to the sandy shore. Hylas, bearing Herakles' weapons and his own, followed close behind.

In pursuance of his resolve Hylas had lifted the barrier of reserve; the two days of mourning in Kyzikon had been spent near to Herakles, talking and walking with him, to all seeming reconciled and devoted. The big man's pleasure at this apparent change of heart had been deep; with every look and smile his fondness for the boy had beamed happily from honest eyes. He passed no comment, however; his manner was unchanged, for it had never been other than gentle, courteous and tender.

Polyphemos' blunt speech had done more than merely shape in Hylas a guileful resolve. For the first time the boy had been given a glimpse of himself as others saw him, and although his first reaction had been to repudiate the image with indignation, further reflection brought him to realise that it was not altogether untrue. Perhaps he had magnified his wrongs to the exclusion of the benefits he had undeniably received. Though he could not forget the killing of his father, would it not be in keeping with true greatness of heart to excuse and forgive? For he, now, had a similar wrong upon his conscience. He had killed the husband of Damia; and the thought that she should nurse against him such resentment as he bore against Herakles appalled and dismayed him. Though the circumstances, even the impulses had been different, there had been no great difference in the nature of the killings. They both had slain

an enemy who himself had sought to kill. Each had unknowingly slain one dear to a person one loved; though in Herakles' case that love had not come until after. Each now regretted the slaying, though at the time it had seemed the right and only thing to do.

Had he, then, any right to nurse his hatred for Herakles, when he longed so passionately for Damia's understanding and forgiveness? Was he, in fact, vindictive, cherishing only evil, ignoring good? Did his hate lie so very deep in his soul, or was it merely the relic of a childish, blind, unreasoning prejudice?

He was compelled to face these questions because he found that simulating an affection for Herakles was not only much easier than he had fancied but relieved his mind of a dark cloud that had long obscured it. Almost, in those two days, he had come to believe that the affection was real, only the hate assumed. Clearly he remembered that night in his boyhood when, alone upon the seashore, he had leaped into Herakles' comforting arms. Was it for that moment alone, in all these years, that his true nature had appeared?—that nature which hitherto had been as loving as loved, but which since then had been overlaid, stifled, starved of affection—by his own deliberate act?

As he splashed through the shallowing water he regarded the great back and proud head of Herakles and wondered how he would feel were Herakles to die; if he knew with certainty that he would never see that fearless face again or hear the quiet voice speaking his name. . . .

He didn't know; he couldn't say. This conflict of emotions bewildered him. All he knew was that until he had his mind more clear he would stay with Herakles; continue to play the part which had become so surprisingly easy, so unexpectedly much to his liking.

* * *

There was good store of fresh meat aboard the *Argo*, killed during those idle days at Kyzikon; a fire was built and cauldrons filled from a spring which fed a clear deep stream some small distance inland beyond a thick belt of trees.

Pleasantly tired, the Argonauts lay around the fire; none spoke now of Kyzikon. That was past and done with; before them lay other adventures of happier augury, and all the exhilarating excitement of the unknown.

Herakles alone was busy. He had found a tree suited to his purpose: a straight resilient pine-shaft, sound and strong; his axe rang upon it as he hewed at the thigh-thick butt. Hylas stood near, admiring the play of great muscles in chest and arms and back as Herakles swung stroke upon crashing stroke in a steady unhurried rhythm.

A little before the shaft was ready to fall Herakles looked about him to ensure that nobody should be endangered; he leaned on his long-handled axe and wiped sweat from his eyes with a hairy forearm; white teeth showed in a brown face as he smiled at Hylas.

"You would do well to rest," the boy said. "The light is failing; you can't shape the blade to-night."

"If I leave it until to-morrow the ship must needs wait for me," Herakles replied. "I'll work as long as I can see. But I should be glad of some warm water when I am done; I must bathe before I sleep."

"I am on my way to the spring for that very purpose."

Herakles nodded and smiled. This anticipation of his needs was one of the ways which Hylas had chosen to show his changed attitude; it was more convincing than any protestation. Hylas smiled back at him and passed with his big brazen pitcher into the shadow of the darkening wood.

The clear quiet stream ran here through a space of grass; it was black with depth and mirrored tranquilly a calm, tranquil sky. The thick screen of trees muffled the noise of the sea; it was still and peaceful, conducive to reflection. As Hylas kneeled to fill the pitcher he saw his own face in the water. He studied it critically.

What was in it, or in him, to win Herakles' love? Why had Herakles endured with such patience and gentleness his aversion and sullen obstinacy? Were he in Herakles' place would he not have lost patience long ago; sent him away, or relegated him to some form of domestic servitude? It had to be admitted that he had been treated with astonishing tolerance. . . .

Faintly through the wood came the voice of Polyphemos calling Herakles to the evening meal, and Herakles' answering shout. Recalled from his thoughts Hylas heaved a deep sigh and lowered his pitcher into the water. In the same moment he felt a crashing blow on his head, shattering thought; a brilliant blaze of blinding light lit momentarily in his brain, to be followed by a darkness blacker than the deepest night, into which he felt himself falling and engulfed. Swift hands were upon him; there was a splash, and the foaming roar of water closing over his head. He choked, rose, cried out once, and knew no more.

* * *

The pine-shaft fell; singing to himself Herakles began to trim it. There was yet enough light to see; if he worked fast he could cut the upper end and roughly shape the blade in time for their setting out with the coming of dawn.

Polyphemos called, climbing a sandy path toward him.

"Presently," Herakles replied. "Go and help Hylas; he's fetching water from the spring."

"He's been gone a long time."

"He's probably admiring his reflection. Youth is the time of dreams."

Polyphemos cupped hands to his mouth and called; a cry came from beyond the wood at which he stiffened, glancing at Herakles. But the big man was again intent upon his work; he had not heard, as Polyphemos had, more in that cry than mere acknowledgment.

"I'll go and meet him," Polyphemos said. "That pitcher he's taken will be heavy."

Herakles nodded; Polyphemos, filled with an uneasy premonition, hastened along the sandy track. Eagerly he scanned the turn among the trees; when he came in sight of the water he broke into a run.

Hylas was not there. Only an idle leaf drifted upon the black, silent, secret water; and, lodged on the rocky bottom, a brass pitcher gleamed dully with the last pale light.

He ran back to Herakles shouting; Herakles' eyes glittered in a whitening face as he heard the old man's words. He came toward Polyphemos at a run, seized him, blazed down into his face.

“It’s not true!” he choked. “It’s not true!”
And he shook the sturdy sailor as a tempest shakes an oak.
Polyphemos grunted.

“You’re wasting time, you fool. Kill me if you like, but that won’t bring Hylas back. He’s gone, I tell you!”

Herakles threw him aside and rushed into the wood, calling. By the water he halted, peering down at the pitcher; then ran this way and that, marking faint footprints, signs given by leaves and broken twigs and rubbed bark. He called again, anxiously, despairingly.

Down by the seashore the Argonauts heard his voice and stared at each other dumbly. Then Polyphemos came running down, and food was forgotten as they moved into the wood.

And darkness came down upon the hills, so that further search was vain. Silence, too, as one by one they went back to the seashore, recognising what Herakles refused to admit: that Hylas would not be seen again. Herakles’ call alone sounded upon the hills.

“Hylas! Hylas!”

No answer but echo—the mechanical, meaningless repetition of his voice with all its burden of love, anxiety, fear—mocking him as he stumbled among the crags.

“Hylas! Hylas!”

Higher he climbed, oblivious of all things: those who waited at the ship, the growing dark, weariness, hunger, danger from lurking man or prowling beast. His call was more despairing now; surely Hylas would have answered had he been able.

“Hylas! Oh, Hylas!”

Upward still, calling, through clefts and passes which for years no man had trodden. Down again, and beside the mountain stream, his voice sounding fainter as the deep wood stifled it. Widely he ranged through the slow night hours, until dawn paled the stars and even his great strength became weariness. As day broke he called no more, but lay face down upon the earth, while great sobs tore him and he beat the ground with his fists in impotent agony.

Down by the ship they waited, talking in low voices together, while Polyphemos stood silently by Herakles, finding no word of comfort for the man with a thousand friends. . . .

Twelve

Hylas opened his eyes to a dim green light. He was cramped and stiff and his head hurt when he moved it. Slowly and painfully he stood up, staring about him.

He had been lying in a shallow cave, over the mouth of which long creeping plants trailed, giving greenness to the thin light of early day. He was upon a couch of fern; another, pressed but now unoccupied, filled the opposite side. He regarded it dully; it hurt his head to think; but as memory came back staggered to the mouth of the cave. His knife was gone from his belt. He had no other weapon.

Somebody had stunned him and tipped him into the stream. Somebody had brought him to this cave and slept beside him. Somebody, no doubt, would return. And he had no idea who that somebody was, nor why he was here, nor the reason for the attack upon him.

Clearly there was an enemy to be met, and he was unarmed. Obviously Herakles and the Argonauts had not been able to find him or he would not be here now. That they had looked for him he had no doubt, for it was inconceivable that they had been his assailants. Perhaps they were looking for him now; possibly they were near. That depended on how far he had been carried while he was senseless, where he was now.

He parted the creepers. Almost at his feet the mountain stream flowed seaward. Before him rose a vast perspective of wooded hills and rugged peaks, a wild scene of primeval grandeur untamed by the habitations of men. To his left lay the bay in which the *Argo* had lain, but a wood hid from him the beach and anchorage.

The light hurt his eyes; he stood blinking in the sunshine, gathering his strength; watchful for movement, plotting the line of his passage to the beach.

It had not occurred to him to question the need for his return to the *Argo* and Herakles.

He turned quickly: a twig had snapped beneath a moving foot. Near him a slight figure emerged from the shadow of trees, running toward the cave. He drew back into the shelter of the trailing vines, staring incredulously.

As the footsteps slowed at the entrance——

“Damia!” he exclaimed. “How do you come here?”

The girl stood still, looking at him with unreadable eyes. Her long dark hair was bound about her head and hidden by a coloured cloth knotted at the nape of her neck; she wore a girdled tunic and her legs were bare from the knee. Straight and slender, she might have been taken for a youth by one who had not seen her before. But Hylas was not deceived.

“I followed you,” Damia said.

“Why?”

“Why should you think?”

Hylas was silent. Either she had followed him because she loved him or because she hated him. It was not easy to accuse her of either.

“Well, here I am,” he said. “Apparently you found me.”

“Yes, I found you.”

“And brought me here?”

“Yes.”

“I was stunned and pushed into the stream, I suppose to drown. You pulled me out?”

“Yes.”

“I wonder,” Hylas said, watching her intently, “who pushed me in. And why?”

“Luckily I found you before it was too late.”

“Ah! But did nobody come looking for me?”

“If so, they didn’t find you.”

“Where are they now?”

“Gone.”

“Gone! All of them?”

“Yes.”

“Even Herakles?”

Damia nodded, her eyes holding his, challenging yet defensive. Hylas turned from her and ran through the belt of trees to the seashore.

Damia had not lied. The bay was empty. A heap of ashes, grey and cold, marked where their fire had been. Hylas stirred them with his toe, frowned, stared at the fading footprints of many men. When he returned to the cave he found Damia standing as he had left her.

“How long have I been lying here?” he demanded.

“Two nights and a day.”

“The ship left yesterday, at dawn?”

“Yes.”

Hylas nodded. So much he had read from the signs on the shore. He went into the cave and sat down, holding his head in his hands. Damia stood still, watching him. Presently he looked up.

“Why have you done this, Damia?” he asked. The girl came into the cave and sank down on her couch of bracken.

“What have I done?”

“You tried to kill me, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“That I can understand; but why, having so nearly succeeded, did you relent?”

Damia made a helpless gesture.

“For a day and two nights I have been asking myself that. And yet, you see, you are still alive.”

There was a long silence. When Hylas looked up again——

“Is there any food?” he asked.

“No.”

“Are you hungry?”

At that Damia’s composure melted; she burst into tears. Hylas regarded her with dismay; he didn’t know how to deal with her. The one thing, obviously, was to find food, for them both; for he, too, was ravenously hungry. Useless to search the earth, for the fruits of autumn were long rotted away, the new leaves yet freshly green upon the trees. Animals there might be in plenty, but he had neither bow nor spear, nor means to make a fire by which to make the flesh eatable.

“Is there no settlement near?” he asked.

“I saw none between here and Kyzikon.”

“How did you come? On foot?”

“No. I took a neighbour’s horse, keeping in sight of your ship all day.”

“Where is the horse now?”

“It broke away from where I had tethered it and went back. I have not seen it since.”

“We must go back to Kyzikon.”

“No—no!”

“Why not?”

“Not there! I will never go there again!”

Her voice, though broken with sobs, was strong with passionate determination. Hylas sighed, not knowing what best to do. Herakles would have known; he, who was never at a loss. Somehow he would have procured food, made a fire . . . with a light word on his lips, smiling, unconcerned.

The words of Polyphemos recurred to him. Well, now he had to think and act alone. Think and act for two; for Damia was obviously helpless and dependent upon him. He wondered greatly at the violence of hate that must have urged her on through that long ride in unknown country; the hate that had so quickly, unaccountably melted as its object seemed achieved.

Again he could hear the voice of Polyphemos—“Who can tell the working of a woman’s mind?”

He stood up.

“We will talk of this later, when we have eaten.”

Damia looked at him between her fingers, her eyes widening with hope.

“You know where to find food?”

“Not yet.”

“Then——”

Hylas looked down at her. “If we don’t eat we shall starve,” he said bluntly. “I have not escaped one death to die that way.”

And he left her sitting in the cave, looking after him with those smouldering, unreadable eyes.

After some thought he went to the place where he had been attacked and drew the forgotten pitcher from the depths. He drank, and felt refreshed; put off his clothes and plunged into the cold, invigorating water. As he pulled himself ashore he grunted at a sudden thought; he walked slowly along the bank, looking intently at the bed of the clear stream. Presently he uttered an exclamation; the dull glint of a knife had rewarded his search; the knife he had carried in his belt since leaving Iolchos.

He dived for the precious blade, retrieved it, and when the sun had dried him dressed again. He cut a long straight stick and returned to the cave, bearing the pitcher full of water.

“My sandals, Damia?”

The girl brought them meekly; Hylas drew the thong from one and bound the knife to the end of the shaft he had cut; poised the improvised, unbalanced spear and made a few casts, wrinkling his nose with disgust at its inaccuracy and clumsiness.

“However, I can do no better now,” he said. “It may be that the mountain goats are unused to men; I can but try.”

“What can I do while you are gone?” Damia asked in a low voice. Hylas considered.

“Gather dry sticks and find tinder,” he replied. “There is a way of making fire by means of a stick pointed and twirled in a socket; I have seen it done but never attempted it myself. Time enough for that when there is something to roast.” He looked down at Damia and suddenly laughed. “You make a sorry villain, Damia,” he added. “Drink from the pitcher; it will drown your hunger a little while.”

“Suppose you don’t find any animals, or they elude you?”

“Then,” said Hylas cheerfully, “we will both drink from the pitcher.” And he strode from the cave barefooted, swinging his spear, the bright sun gleaming on his shoulders and strong, supple legs. Damia watched him until he was hidden by trees; then with a sigh she turned to the pitcher. . . .

Within an hour, knowing their habits and haunts, Hylas came upon traces of the shy mountain goats. Reading the signs with the knowledge of Herakles to aid him he moved higher, facing the wind, treading softly, always in cover. By noon he caught his first glimpse of them; a small herd, with heavy curling horns and shaggy hides; agile, alert, but as yet unsuspecting. Cautiously he drew nearer, breathing a prayer to Apollo the far-smiter that they might be led within spear-cast of a downwind knot of trees toward which he was moving.

Slowly the grazing herd moved; silently Hylas moved with them, singling out a young goat less wary than the rest. He was crawling now, a hand’s-breadth at a time, tense and watchful, recalling every trick, observing every caution he had ever learnt from his teacher. Closer yet, so that he could have found his mark with a well-made hunting-spear; but that in his hand was not to be trusted in a matter so vital; once alarmed the herd would run far beyond his reach.

Nearer he crept, until with a sudden shout he rose. For a startled moment the young goat looked toward him, offering a still mark, and Hylas threw. The spear was still flying as the animal turned away, but Hylas had anticipated its movement and the keen blade struck true and deep.

Not only the young goat fell, however; for as the frightened herd bounded away another sank to her knees, bleating piteously, her rough sides jerking. Hylas watched in astonishment until the truth flashed upon him; then with a cry of thanksgiving to all kindly gods he leaped forward to her aid. . . .

With the second sandal-thong which he had brought with him and a sharpened stick hammered into the ground by a stone Hylas tethered the mother by a horn; she looked up at him with terrified eyes while the tiny new-born kid lay panting on the grass beside her. There was no fear that they would move for awhile, and Hylas bore the dead goat downwind to flay and divide. He washed and roughly scraped the hide and wrapped the precious meat in it, leaving the rest for the great carrion crows and clamorous gulls that wheeled about him as he worked.

When all was ready for his return the mother was trying to rise; her strength seemed fully restored and Hylas had much ado to hold her while he made a halter of the two thongs and his belt. She resisted strongly at first as he led her downhill, but soon became docile enough as the kid trotted happily beside her. When the tiny animal showed signs of tiring Hylas picked it up; it lay quietly in the crook of his arm and went to sleep. And so he came back to the cave, weary and heavily burdened, in the glow of the evening light.

Damia was watching for him; she cried out at sight of the kid, took it from him and crooned over it as a mother to a baby.

"It will do when the meat is finished," Hylas said; but Damia made great protest. Hylas shrugged, laughed and tied the mother to a tree; the kid ran to her, nuzzling hungrily. Hylas emptied the remaining water from the pitcher and gave it to Damia.

"There will be milk to sustain us while I make a fire," he said. "Where are the sticks?"

Damia looked at him and laughed; she led him to a small sheltered depression amid overhanging rocks. Hylas was astounded to find a glowing, smokeless fire where thick pine logs lay starwise on a heap of hot ash. He regarded Damia with new respect. She laughed at his expression, delighted by his obvious wonder.

"I have not only seen it done, but have often done it myself," she explained. "In a new settlement such as Kyzikon these things are quickly learnt." She showed him the indented log in which she had twirled the pointed stick, shaped with a sharp stone. "But oh, my hands are sore and blistered! See, here are spits ready for the meat; but how I shall find patience to wait until it is cooked I do not know."

They spiked the meat and set it to the fire, supporting the stakes in forked sticks hammered into the ground. Then, while Damia milked the uneasy goat, Hylas went to the stream, stripped and plunged in.

As he floated on his back he looked up at a placid sky and wondered much at the strange turn of events which had separated him from Herakles just when he had begun to abandon his long-cherished dream. It was too soon yet to decide if he were glad or sorry; the pressing needs of the day had left no time for analysis or introspection, and he was too tired now to pursue the matter. Also his head still hurt and often during the day he had felt dizzy and sick. These things he attributed to the blow; they would pass. For the rest he felt unaccountably light of heart.

The voice of Damia broke in on his reflections; he scrambled to the bank, dressed quickly and hurried to the fire. An appetising smell drifted toward him; Damia was beckoning, her mouth full . . .

Hylas broke into a run.

* * *

At dusk, free from hunger and pleasantly drowsy, they returned to the cave.

"To-morrow," Hylas said, "we will start back for Perkote."

Damia looked at him oddly but said nothing.

"We will take the goat with us; she will give us milk and, if all else fails, meat. We shall be many days on the journey."

Still Damia was silent. Hylas sniffed the air.

"It will be cold to-night. To-morrow I will dry that hide; it will make a warm cover for your bed."

"Have you no fear that I shall try again to kill you?" Damia asked.

"None."

"You seem very sure."

"Without me you would starve."

"Is that all?"

"You are no fool, Damia; neither, I hope, am I. While we are alone to face whatever lies between us and Perkote we are allies. You need me; there is much that you can do that I cannot. When we are safely returned—well, we shall see."

"I am in no haste to return to Perkote."

"Where, then, would you rather go?"

"There is much to be said for a warm, dry cave, a goat to give milk, a stream near by, and—"

"And what?"

"Dreamless sleep." And Damia looked at him, laughing low and provocatively.

"Ah! Well, if that is your desire you can remain here. I will leave you the goat; I shall travel faster without her."

"You'd leave me here alone?"

"Isn't that what you were wanting?"

There was a short silence. Presently—

"If it was your intention to kill me," Hylas said, "why did you leave Kyzikon unarmed? You could not have been sure of finding me alone, in such circumstances as to make possible what in fact happened."

"I had a knife."

"Ah! Where is it now?"

"I lost it. The movement of the horse must have jogged it from my girdle."

"Yet you still followed?"

"It was too late then to turn back. I was frightened to be alone with the dark night, far from anyone."

Hylas sat back and regarded her with wonder.

"And after they were gone: you were alone for a day and a night?"

"Except for you."

"I? Small comfort that must have been: unconscious, helpless——"

"Yet I was not alone. In the darkness I could hear your breathing; put out my hand and touch yours."

"True; but——"

"Also there were things to do; you had to be watched and cared for."

"Without fire or food?"

"I had brought some cakes of meal; they lasted me until noon yesterday."

"But were you not cold in the night, with nothing to cover you?"

Damia glanced at him, and away.

"Oh, I did well enough."

Hylas yawned. "I wonder where Herakles is now?" he said; and laid down and went to sleep.

* * *

For a long time Damia sat on her couch of leaves, watching him, until the light grew dim and only a faint pale gleam showed where he lay. A sudden thought came to her; she crept toward him silently, feeling for his knife.

It lay beside him, unconcealed. She picked it up, stared at it and down at the half-averted face. Then, with a little choking sob, she dropped the knife as if it were a snake, crept back to her own couch and lay down; gazing at a star's light flickering through a veil of leaves which the night-wind lightly stirred, while her thoughts ran wildly, feverishly through the dark ways of her undisciplined mind.

Until presently she, too, fell asleep.

Thirteen

Hylas awoke next morning depressed and feeling far from well. Though the wound at the back of his head was healing the intermittent pain still dizzied him, and soon after

rising, on his way to the stream, he was sick. But he said nothing of these things to Damia.

She no longer attracted him. Her murderous attack on him had killed all that. Although she had immediately repented, saved him from drowning and tended him while he lay unconscious he owed her little gratitude, feeling that in remaining with him she had served her own interests as well as his. She could not have made her way to Kyzikon, much less Perkote, afoot and without food except by enduring great hardship and privation, facing the risk of capture by wild tribes or injury or death from lions or wolves. His recovery may have meant to her as much as to him the difference between life and death.

But she was a woman; and although his outlook was still coloured by the contempt he had learned from Herakles for all women, he felt responsible for Damia. He felt no antipathy; he understood her motives too clearly. He was merely indifferent.

Unconsciously, though three or four years the younger, Hylas had assumed the leadership. It certainly occurred to him that a woman who could face unknown dangers in a perilous land merely to serve her hate was capable of more than the meek subservience she had shown from the time of his reawakening. To Hylas this was immaterial. He was the man; it was his duty to find food and shelter, determine when they should travel, when rest. Damia should do as she was told, whatever her views. He was in no mood to brook opposition or argument; his constant headache and the occasional pangs of violent pain which almost blinded him made him irritable and resentful. Had it not been for her he would still be with the Argonauts. She had robbed him of his chance of honour and rénown; as soon as he could he would win free of her and seek other paths to glory.

At first he had considered the possibility of trying to overtake the *Argo*, travelling by land; it was unlikely that the ship would not make an occasional stay at places along the coast for perhaps a day or two. But he dismissed this idea, for he could not take Damia; and he could not bring himself to abandon her. He must see her safely restored to her kinsfolk

before making further plans of his own. She would not bide at Kyzikon; it was all one to him, now, that it must be to Perkote, farther west, that they must journey.

There was food in plenty for a day or two, though it made no light burden. The pitcher, too, must be carried, for there was no other receptacle for the goat's milk. Damia carried that, Hylas bearing the meat and leading the goat by a halter improvised from his belt, which he had cut into strips and knotted together. They set out after a meal in the early morning on the first stage of their long slow journey to the west.

Hylas' purpose was simple: to follow the seacoast, skirting Kyzikon, beyond which the way was known to Damia. As they passed along the unpathwayed clifftop Hylas wondered how she had kept the *Argo* in sight without herself being seen. He asked her.

"I kept ahead of you all the time from your setting out," Damia replied. "It was easy to see the ship, even from some distance; impossible for anyone aboard her to see me, for I emerged from the woods but seldom, and then cautiously, leaving my horse hidden. Sometimes there were streams to be crossed or chasms to be skirted; then I had to make detours inland; but there were other stretches over which I could gallop, gaining all I had lost. I guessed where you would camp for the night, for it was darkening when you came to that anchorage and I knew you would not round the headland in the failing light. So I rode on ahead and searched for a cave where I might lie hidden. The rest you know."

"You must have hated me very much."

"I did; or thought so. But when I had struck . . . your white face as the drifting stream bore you away . . . all my hate, I think, went with it. Had I killed you I, too, should have died."

"And yet——"

"I know what you would say; my husband is dead and I am alone. And yet—I am not altogether unhappy."

Her dark eyes looked up into Hylas' face.

"Why I no longer hate you I do not know; I have cause enough," she said. "Do you hate me?"

"I? No, I think not."

"Though I have parted you from your friends—from Herakles, so dear to you?"

"He dear to me? He, who killed my father?" .

"Why, I thought——"

Hylas laughed shortly. "For seven years I have prayed for the moment that should deliver me from him," he said. "And now that it has come——" He shrugged. "Let us speak of other things. Where will you go in Perkote?"

"I do not know. That will wait until we come there. What will you do?"

"I have not decided."

They fell silent, each having much to think about. For all that Damia had said that she was in no great haste she hurried Hylas forward, looking often behind her; for she had heard Herakles crying Hylas on the hills through that night as she crouched dumbly, fearfully in the cave beside him; she had seen the *Argo* sail, and knew, as Hylas did not, that Herakles and Polyphemos had been left on the Mysian shore; that the ship had sailed without them.

Somewhere they were seeking Hylas still.

And Damia was afraid.

* * *

In the early morning light Herakles had read much from the signs left at the side of the stream. He had found hoofmarks of a horse, and bark slightly rubbed where the bridle had been knotted; had found the heavy stick, to which a few dark hairs still clung; the marks of sandalled feet, though too faint and trampled to tell much of whoever had stolen behind Hylas and struck him as he knelt. He had seen how the horse had turned and started westward, but the rocky ground had taken no imprint of other feet. There was nothing to tell him that Hylas had been in the water; from what he found he formed the opinion that Hylas had been overcome and stolen away by his unknown assailant, who had made off with him on horseback to the west. Who had done this, and by what motive impelled, he could not imagine; but clearly it was by no intention on the part of Hylas.

At once, therefore, he started in pursuit, watching for further hoofprints where softer ground was met, casting about at

the fordings of streams and heads of valleys where precipitous gulfs must be skirted; finding what he sought and pressing on, regardless of the need for food and Polyphemos' years.

For two days they travelled thus, until more than half the distance to Kyzikon had been covered. And then the hoof-marks abruptly halted among a confused pattern of other hooves and roughly-shod human feet which led away to the wild mountainous lands to the southward.

Herakles' face was grim.

"They are many; we are but two," he said to Polyphemos, "but I bear a spear and bow and you have fought in many battles. Our way lies to the south."

Polyphemos nodded.

"It may be to death," he muttered, "but what of that? Soon or late it comes." And he remembered a fierce face and uplifted club; a spear thrown with unerring aim, and Hylas, white and shaken, looking down on the man he had killed. Had it not been for the boy he would have no life now to give in attempting Hylas' rescue from whoever had taken him captive.

So they turned their backs to the sea, their faces to the uplands, two days ahead of him they sought mistakenly there. And the footprints of the roughly-shod feet led them deeper and deeper into gloomy gorges and treeclad heights where civilised men had never been.

* * *

It was the custom of Merops, the seer of Perkote, to walk beside the river when his mind was vexed. Since his return from Kyzikon he had increasingly sought this relief, for his daughter's strangeness filled him with anxiety and foreboding. Fervently he hoped that the tragedy of her brief wifehood had not darkened her mind; but since that evil day he seemed to have lost the key to her thoughts.

Kleite's mother had died in giving birth to her third son and fourth child; Merops had not taken another wife, but had devoted himself to the daughter he adored. As she grew he watched over her expanding mind, guiding it gently toward things which were fine and good, yet denying her none of those small, frivolous enjoyments dear to the hearts of children. Her maidenhood had been happy and carefree:

in her seventeenth year he had hoped to crown her happiness by marrying her to Kyzikos.

He could understand her silence, sympathise with her grief; but there was that in her manner which disturbed and baffled him. A dark curtain had been drawn between them which for all his wisdom he could not pierce. She was nursing some secret, of that he felt sure; some hidden thought which put silence on her lips, clouded her eyes with sombre brooding. More than sorrow, deeper than grief: as if her spirit were dead.

Gently and with patience he soothed her sorrow, spoke hopefully of bright years ahead when Kyzikos would be no more than a memory. Other means, too, he tried of winning the laughter back to her lips; she tried to respond, but quickly fell back into her silent abstraction, sitting for hours together looking before her, unseeing and oblivious.

So Merops walked beside the river, deep in thought, trying to read from its swift untroubled flow a solution of the problem which defied both reason and intuition. It had never failed him before; but he had never tried to read the secret of a woman's heart. He had thought his daughter's mind as clear as this water to his eyes; it troubled and exasperated him that she should be as remote from him as the summit of Dindymon. What use the wisdom and understanding whereby he could so easily have drawn her from the dark flood into which she was sinking, if she would not put out her hand to grasp his?

As he paced beside the river one evening pondering these things he became aware of two upon the opposite bank whose steps matched his, apparently seeking a ford; for the town lay upon the westward side. Two youths; the taller dark and bareheaded, leaning heavily upon a staff to which a knife was bound and leading a goat, a kid at her side. The other bore an empty brass pitcher.

Merops looked at them keenly. They were travel-stained and obviously spent. Something in the taller youth's face aroused his quick sympathy. The boy was ill; his footsteps dragged with more than weariness and there was a pallor beneath his face's tan. As they splashed across the ford he waited for them; they were strangers, though the taller boy's face seemed not unknown to him. The other was regarding Merops

uncertainly, holding back as if to escape notice. As Merops studied the small round face he uttered a cry of surprise.

“Damia!”

She nodded. Then Merops remembered where he had seen the other.

“This is one of the Argonauts: he who slew your husband, is it not?”

“Hylas. Yes.”

“He is ill. He should not be on his feet.”

Damia made a helpless gesture. “Perhaps you can persuade him: I cannot,” she replied in a weary voice. “We have travelled farther and faster than if he had been well and—and sane.” And she covered her face with her hands and sobbed from pure exhaustion.

All this time Hylas had been standing by the goat, leaning on his spear, staring glassily at Merops; there was no recognition in his gaze. As Damia finished speaking he began to move in the direction of the town. His footsteps were jerky, automatic, as if some inner impulse animated a body insensible; through the clouded mind some far light drew him on though he was past the uttermost limit of weariness.

Merops laid a hand gently on his shoulder.

“Hylas,” he said, “your journey is done. Rest here; I will take all upon me.”

The boy regarded him dully; Merops’ words did not immediately penetrate to his understanding. At last his lips moved.

“Perkote?” he muttered.

“Yes. This is Perkote. And I am Merops.”

“Merops?”

“Yes. We met at Kyzikon.”

Hylas frowned with the effort to recall Kyzikon. At last he turned slowly to Damia.

“Perkote,” he said. “Home.”

Then he sank to the ground, breathing stertorously, one hand still holding the halter made of leather strips knotted together. Dimly he was aware of an agonised cry; of soft arms about him and a wet face pressed to his cheek. Dimly he heard the quiet voice of Merops and felt strong gentle fingers touching his head.

Then the iron will that had borne him so long and so far, its duty all fulfilled, released him, and the brightness of the day faded from his mind.

* * *

The river, that had never failed Merops yet, had brought him a solution of this problem; for with the coming of Hylas to the house Kleite's depression began to lift. Under her father's direction she nursed the boy as he lay in a stupor, neither fully conscious nor quite asleep; soothing him when the images thronging his disordered mind caused him to cry out in anguish or terror; giving him food and drink with infinite patience and tenderness. Merops, watching, wondered why it had not occurred to him to give her some such employment at first, wherein she could forget herself in ministering to another; but rejoiced to see his daughter's slow but increasing return to normality. Often she would sit, even now, in Hylas' darkened room, staring down at his pale face as if not seeing it; but at a sound or movement she was at his bedside, to calm with a word or the touch of her light hand upon his. Knowing nothing else, Hylas knew these things; they won an increasing power over the darkness that lay on his mind, until the day came when he opened eyes no longer dull and lifeless.

He looked up into a face he knew; a face not Damia's; a face sweet, fair, compassionate, with eyes deeply blue and a mouth grave and sensitive, yet red with youth. A face framed in bright hair, long and lustrous; a head proud, yet bent over him in watchful care.

"Who are you?" he breathed, wondering at her great loveliness.

"I am Kleite, the daughter of Merops."

"Kleite!" He tried to rise, but her hand gently restrained him. He sank back, staring up at her.

"How do I come here?"

"My father brought you. For many days you have been ill: gravely ill: but that is all over and you will soon be quite well. Sleep, now, and do not try to think."

Hylas closed his eyes; but presently:

"You will not leave me?" he whispered.

"No. Not for awhile. Sleep now, Hylas."

From that moment his recovery was rapid. The strength of his body had been little impaired save for the weakness consequent upon lying so long without movement or exercise. The damage to his mind healed quickly, leaving no trace except that his recollection of the days immediately before his collapse was blurred.

Merops watched his progress with satisfaction. He appointed a youth of his household to help Kleite; as Hylas came more and more to his right mind Merops judged it discreet to withdraw his daughter somewhat, allowing the youth to carry food and attend his needs.

Pielos, for so the young man was named, was a year or two older than Hylas; somewhat taciturn and undemonstrative but thoroughly dependable. He had no friends that Merops had ever been able to discover; neither parents nor kin. His only relaxation appeared to be the attainment of skill in the handling of weapons, and the covering of prodigious distances alone and on foot to gain hardihood. From the time he had been summoned to carry Hylas from the riverside where he had fallen to the house of Merops he had shown a deep interest in the young Achaian. When Hylas was permitted to rise from his bed it was upon Pielos' arm that he took his first walk in the garden.

The reason for the young man's interest soon became clear. The coming of the Argonauts to Perkote had inspired in him a profound admiration and envy; it was his dream, apparently, to engage in some such enterprise himself. His was a warlike nature. Neither glory nor profit attracted him; it was in his blood to fight, caring little whom or where or in what cause. So far his life in Perkote had been disappointingly uneventful; he could do no better than live a life of vicarious adventure at the feet of those who would recount to him tales of war and bloodshed, his eyes glowing as he listened. Though younger than himself, Hylas was in his eyes a hero, a demigod; a character akin to those who battled with giants in olden times. There was nothing he would not do to show his adulation.

This hero-worship embarrassed Hylas. Vividly aware of his own lack of glory the boy tried honestly to show himself to Pielos as one who had fallen out from the quest, and all

undeserving of honour. But Pielos respected him the more for this modest self-depreciation; it was in keeping with the qualities of high courage and chivalry which he so ardently admired. At least Hylas had fought in a real battle, which Pielos had never done. The fact that it had been a tragic misunderstanding was beside the point. Hylas had killed a man; wherefore Pielos bowed at his feet.

Kleite and her father watched over Hylas on this first appearance; together they sat on a stone seat beneath a great tree, where a light wind from the sea pleasantly moderated the summer heat. They talked idly, with long intervals of silence in which Kleite often found Hylas' dark eyes fixed upon her, wondering and venerant.

No woman in his life before had seemed to Hylas so truly worshipful as this grave-eyed daughter of Perkote. She aroused in him emotions completely different from those inspired by Iope and, at one time, Damia. All that he had heard or dreamed of high endeavour and exalted aspiration stirred in him as he met her clear, steady eyes, his own gaze lowering before the radiant splendour of loveliness which dazzled and daunted him. Looking upon her he knew the rapt devotion of a priest for a goddess. Having known only a baser emotion he did not at once recognise this as love. It was utterly selfless, seeking only to worship and serve.

He did not regret Iope, though he acknowledged now that Herakles had been right. Iope had awakened his body, leaving his soul untouched. But he was glad that he had not yielded to Damia, either at Kyzikon or later, when opportunities had been many; for he had known fully that his feelings for Damia were the idle folly of an idle hour. He could not have met Kleite's serious, considering eyes without shame had Damia any claim on him.

Pursuing this thought:

“What became of Damia?” he asked.

The least coolness of reserve clouded Kleite's expression. Merops answered him.

“She was taken to her father's house, where she will remain.”

Hylas felt intuitively that he would do well to speak no more of her. Neither was he especially interested. She lay in

that past to which he had no desire to return; part of an evil dream whose shadow still had power to trouble his rest, until dispelled by the bright vision of Kleite.

Alone with Pielos he questioned that unresponsive young man about his master's daughter. Pielos replied briefly, for although he liked and respected Kleite there was no place in his martial mind for softer emotions. To him women were of no account, being for the most part poor, feeble, timorous creatures. If he was disposed to admire any it was Damia, who had dared so much, struck so effectively, endured such hardship on her return, her only company a half-helpless youth. But even she had failed in his eyes; though had she not so swiftly relented Hylas would have died. Much as he would have deplored this consequence, Pielos considered that Damia had thus proved grievously lacking in the highest attributes of manhood. Matters being thus, Hylas recognised the futility of trying to learn what he most wished to know and forbore further question.

Something Pielos knew of the venture which had brought the *Argo* to Perkote, for the town had talked of little else since the ship's departure; he asked Hylas much about the men with whom he had sailed, finding interest in the most trifling details of their lives and experiences. Amused, touched and flattered at being numbered among those for whom Pielos had so deep a reverence, Hylas recounted all he had ever known or heard of Iason, Herakles, Argus, Polyphemos and the rest; of the golden armour, too, and the unhappy children of Nephele; until Pielos knew almost as much of the matter as Hylas himself. Pielos had heard of Kolchis, but beyond an impression that it lay many days' journeying to the east could tell little of it. He sympathised profoundly with Hylas at the misfortune which had robbed him of the glory of the quest.

"I suppose," he said with diffidence, "that if you were to find a boat there would be no chance of overtaking them before they came to Kolchis?" But he knew, before Hylas shook his head, that the idea was wildly impracticable.

Nevertheless he thought much of what he had been told, while Hylas sat in the sunshine dreaming of Kleite. Until one day he asked:

“What will you do when your strength is fully restored?”

The same question had been vexing Hylas. Clearly he could not remain in this hospitable house indefinitely; but where he should go, and with what purpose, was still in doubt. He meant to win honour, make his name known; but Ilion seemed to offer little scope, or Pielos would not be staying idle at home. And Achaia—was far from Kleite.

“I do not know,” he said with a sigh.

“Of course,” Pielos said, “it all happened long ago, and Argus may have told the truth of the matter; but—”

“What is in your mind, Pielos?”

The young man looked up, flushed darkly, anticipating laughter.

“The quest of the golden armour is not for you,” he replied, “nor the restoring of Phrixos to his father’s house. But to seek and find the girl Helle. . . .”

Hylas regarded him with an expression that changed from astonishment through thoughtfulness to excitement. Obvious as the idea was, it had never occurred to him. He seized Pielos’ hand.

“That would be a venture all our own!” he cried with enthusiasm.

Pielos’ eyes lit up; his face was radiant.

“You would take me with you?” he asked wonderingly. “You, one of the Argonauts?”

Hylas smiled, though the young man’s eagerness moved him deeply.

“I could wish for no better companion,” he replied.

Fourteen

Though the chance of Helle being still alive was remote, the likelihood of tracing her after so many years remoter still, Hylas seized upon the idea with the highest degree of enthusiasm. He searched his memory for every detail that might help him, wishing that he had asked more concerning

her of Argus when the opportunity had been his. But the fact was that the expedition against Kolchis had as its object less the restoring of Phrixos than the winning back of the armour of Ares. The tale of Helle's loss off Abydos had been accepted, true or false. Only the doubt which Herakles had more than once expressed in his hearing upheld Hylas as he began to plan the course he should take. He was prepared for failure and disappointment; the faint hope that he might succeed outweighed every doubt.

The venture exactly fitted his mood. Here was a deed which, if accomplished, he could lay before Kleite, winning from her a smile, a word of praise, a touch of her hand on his. More he dared not hope. He was in that state of adoration which finds a morbid pleasure in contemplating the unattainability of the ideal. Enough for him that if he died in the attempt he would die worthily. Perhaps, long years after, Kleite would come to hear of it, and shed a tear in memory of one to whom she had once been kind. . . .

More practical considerations had to be met, and he took counsel of the wisdom of Merops. The old soothsayer shook a doubtful head, yet even he was moved to interest by the boy's enthusiasm.

"Even had she landed safely in Abydos, much may have happened to her in ten years," he said. "I have never heard her name; and surely there would have been some report of her. She was no unknown child, but the daughter of an Achaian king."

"It may be that she concealed her name and lineage, fearing even in Ilion the hate of her stepmother Ino."

"It is possible. She would now be a woman of twenty-three or four. Have you ever heard what manner of girl she was—fair or dark, short or tall?"

"I have been trying to recall. I can remember nothing."

"Even the colour of her eyes would be some guidance."

"That, also, I do not know. But the eyes of both Athamas and Nephele, as I have heard, are brown."

"It might be a likely assumption, then, that hers are brown. But there are more brown eyes than grey or blue in Ilion. Also she might have drifted or been carried beyond this land."

There are caravans which journey as far as Nineveh and Babylon."

"If she is alive I shall find her."

The boy spoke with a quiet determination that impressed Merops more than any bravado. Had he known, there was more than a little of Herakles in the thought and its expression.

"Where will you start?"

"I think at Abydos."

Merops nodded. "I have friends there who will help you," he said. "I might even go with you. It is long since I was in Abydos; also it is my wish to meet the new king of Dardania. His father Kapys was an old friend of my boyhood days. He was of the line of Assarachos, son of Tros; he married his cousin Themis, the sister of Laomedon who now rules in Troy. Young Anchises, the new king of Dardania, inherits royal blood from both parents. As a child he gave promise of great beauty; it will be interesting to see into what kind of a man he has grown."

And the old man called Kleite to bid her prepare for the journey.

Such an auspicious beginning emboldened Hylas to ask that Pielos should be released to share his venture; after some thought Merops agreed. The truth was that Hylas had aroused the old man's interest and affection; he felt that the boy would be safer in the company of one whom he knew and could trust than journeying alone wherever this fantastic quest might lead him.

When Kleite heard of Hylas' intention she smiled and spoke heartening words. "I shall pray to Kybele, great mother of the gods, to guide your footsteps aright," she told him. "And whether you succeed or fail, it is a fine and noble thought."

Hylas blushed that the inspiration was not his; but in the honesty of his heart admitted to Kleite that it had been born of Pielos' mind. She regarded him gravely.

"I respect you the more, Hylas, for telling me that," she said. "But from whatever source the idea sprang, it is your will and spirit that will guide the enterprise. Alone, Pielos would have done no more than sit at home and dream."

Hylas hoped that this might be true; for the moment it was enough that Kleite believed it.

Pielos spread the tale through all Perkote, achieving no small distinction by virtue of having been chosen as Hylas' companion; for he was not alone in according high respect to one who had sailed with the *Argo*. The small town was put in a pleasurable flurry; had Hylas wished he could have led a score of eager youths on the venture. Gifts of all kinds were pressed upon him; weapons, clothes, sandals, more than twenty could have carried. He selected from these only what he needed: spears for himself and Pielos and a knife of keener temper than his own, forged by the Chalybes of the remote east. But he regarded the bows with some scorn.

"These are no more than children's toys," he confided to Pielos, "and unworthy of a true archer. As well fly a feather at an enemy as a shaft from these poor things." Pielos, who found them as much as he could bend, blushed in silence at his own inadequacy.

Often as he made his preparations and spoke of his plans Hylas felt Kleite's eyes upon him; their expression was thoughtful, considering, slightly puzzled. He could not read what was in her mind; it was as if she were looking for something in him that she expected yet feared to find. She said nothing, however, until the day set for their departure. Then Hylas, with nothing more to do but wait, asked her outright why she regarded him so. For a moment she hesitated; then, matching his frankness——

"Why do you never speak of Damia?" she asked.

Hylas snorted.

"She, who would have made a fool of me, then tried to kill me—and very nearly succeeded, though not as she had meant? Let Damia be forgotten."

"Do you feel, then, that you owe her nothing?"

It was Hylas' turn to pause before answering. He flushed as he raised his eyes to the clear candour of Kleite's gaze.

"Only this: that she led me to you," he replied in a low voice. And because she was all woman and could read in Hylas' face what his lips left unspoken Kleite, too, coloured slightly.

"She came here often, asking after you when you were ill," she said.

“I am glad that I knew nothing of it.”

“It would be gracious in you to see her and assure her of your forgiveness. She is very unhappy.”

“I have no desire to see her again; but if it is your wish——”

“Not my wish, Hylas. The decision is for you to make, and I will not influence you.”

“Nevertheless, because you think it right it must be so. I will see her.”

“I will ask Pielos to bring her to the garden. We will not tell my father; he is incensed against her for the evil she would have done.”

He found pleasure in sharing a secret with Kleite, even from the man to whom he owed so much. That afternoon, then, while Merops rested in the cool of the house, Damia came to the garden. Keenly Kleite watched the faces of the two as they met; when she left them she was quite assured that whatever had been between Hylas and Damia was dead. His eyes held neither love nor hate, friendliness nor dislike. He was indifferent.

Damia, too, read him rightly; and it went to her heart. What they said to one another in that quiet garden is lost; but Hylas was strangely subdued for the rest of that day and Damia’s eyes were hard and bright when she left him.

He did not see her again before the departure.

* * *

At Dardanos Hylas was presented to the young king, who greatly impressed him. Anchises was tall and slender, strikingly handsome and with a manner proud and lordly. His stateliness was relieved somewhat by a subtle humour; more, however, of the intellect than heart. He lived in a splendid house above the city, in which were gathered fine and costly works of craftsmanship and art. Statues adorned the halls, brought from Achaia, Egypt, Babylon; carpets and hangings that glowed with colour, woven in strange designs. Weapons of war and of the chase were there in bewildering variety; the uses of some Hylas could only guess. But among them was a bow of black horn, cunningly jointed; a smooth, gently-tapering curve of swift death over which he cried out in joy.

"I have never seen a bow more to my liking," he told the smiling young king. "See how sweetly it bends: how even is the pull!"

"String it," Anchises said, "and fly an arrow at some mark."

Hylas obeyed him with alacrity; drew a shaft from a quiver and ran to a window, looking about for a worthy target. A gull wheeled over the nearer houses, hovered a moment and made back toward the sea. The black bow thrummed and quivered; the gull screamed once, and fell like a stooping hawk. . . .

Anchises glanced at Merops, one eyebrow raised. Hylas regarded the bow in his hands with reverent delight.

"Here is indeed a bow fit for a king," he cried. "What is its history, if it be known?"

"It was given to my father by a wanderer from the north," Anchises replied. "It is said to have come from the outermost lands of the earth, where there is always snow and no sun shines." He paused; then added with his charming smile—"I have never seen it strung before."

Hylas looked his astonishment. So long used to comparing himself with the might of Herakles, he had not realised that the slighter-built Ilians would think him strong. He unstrung the bow and replaced it, though his eyes lingered on it lovingly. Anchises picked it up, ran his fingers over the smooth horn; smiled, and put it into Hylas' hands.

"The man who made this bow," he said, "meant it for such hands as yours. Take it; I cannot think of a bearer more worthy."

Hylas stammered thanks. Anchises smiled at his obvious delight. Sighed, too, that an ingenuous heart could find such pleasure in so small a gift. The weapon had no use for him; no value except as a curio. Prince of a rich and cultured line, he had long ceased to find interest in anything but the most rare and costly. Almost he envied Hylas his unspoiled simplicity.

They stayed in Abydos at the house of Merops' friend Amyntor, an irascible old gentleman with a stiff beard and denunciatory eyebrows, who knew nearly all the townsfolk and much of their fathers. But he had not heard of Helle, nor did he offer any hope that a search for her might succeed.

"Had she been cast ashore and saved by those who live on the coast I should have heard of it," he said, "for here in Abydos we have not so many topics that such an event would be overlooked. On the other hand I have never heard that her body was ever found on these shores. The wind may have drifted her, alive or dead, across the straits to the Thracian coast. They of Sestos may know."

But Hylas would not take this as final and decided to make inquiries of his own. Amyntor shrugged, but offered him shelter for as long as he cared to stay. Merops and Kleite went back to Perkote. Before she left Kleite gave Hylas her hands and smiled at him.

"Do not forget us, O friend of kings," she said. "We shall look for you; our thoughts will go with you, and our prayers."

"And mine will often return to a certain garden overlooking the sea," Hylas replied, "where I have been happier than ever before. Some day I shall come back, Kleite, hoping to see you there."

The girl looked at him steadily.

"I do not know where else I should be," she said, "for I will live beneath no roof but my father's from now until my life's end."

She gazed deeply into his eyes, smiled—rather sadly, he thought—and left him.

On the way back to Perkote—

"I wish Hylas were not going to look for Helle," she said to her father.

"I am afraid he is chasing a shadow, and will not find her."

"I," Kleite said, "fear that he will." And for the rest of the journey she was deep in an abstracted silence.

* * *

Pielos had taken for granted that their search would at once involve them in the most desperate affrays with unknown and violently hostile people, from which they would hardly escape with their lives. After some days spent in contemplating the sea from the doorways of various huts along the seashore while Hylas questioned those within, he began to modify his first hopeful impression.

Ten years was a long time for people to remember anything in which they had not been directly involved. But Hylas moved patiently from one hut to another; if anyone had helped or even seen the child they would recall it clearly enough. From Abydos south-westward to Dardanos; from Dardanos back almost to Perkote he made his way, until no hut had been left unvisited, no possible source of information untapped.

Without result.

Men had died, or left their homes for other, often unknown, places. Women had married and gone elsewhere. Children had grown up and borne children of their own. No faintest memory remained of a child who might have been washed ashore ten years before.

Pielos looked downhearted. Hylas smiled and laid a hand on his shoulder.

"It would be a poor venture that should succeed in the first few days," he said. "This is the first and most obvious course. There are many others; and who knows into what perils we may run before our quest is ended?"

Pielos was a little reassured, and further sharpened his already keen spears.

Hylas went then to the slave market. Most of the dealers had been established there for many years, and the word of Amyntor opened their doors to him. Here he found more than uncertain memory to call upon, for records going back over several years were consulted, and although names were lacking, particulars were entered from which the girl he sought might have been readily identified.

There was no such record.

Certainly there were other minor traders who came and went, and it was thought likely that one of these would more probably have dealt in a lost child than the permanent men, who were more scrupulous in enquiring from what source their slaves had been drawn. Achaian girls of good lineage were not sold in Abydos. These smaller men, however, were hard to trace, and would have been unlikely to admit the sale even had they remembered it.

Hylas thanked the dealers courteously and went to the priests.

He had heard Kleite speak of the goddess Kybele, for whom she appeared to have a deep reverence. Though little known in Achaia, Kybele was widely worshipped in Ilion and farther east; a centre of the cult had lately been established near Kyzikon. The chief shrine of the goddess, however, was upon Mount Ida in Southern Ilion, where a large company of priests and women served the great mother of the gods with peculiar rites.

The worship of Pallas Athene was firmly established in Troy; that of Kybele had spread in recent years from the east, gaining many adherents but making its greatest appeal to the country folk. She was the personification of nature and the earth's abundant fruitfulness; the universal mother, of gods and nature and men. Her shrine was a sequestered cave upon a mountain. Many women were known to have left their homes and devoted themselves to the service of Kybele; either from religious conviction or because of the somewhat erotic nature of the ceremonies in which they were employed. The worship of the goddess appealed to the highest and the lowest in men and women alike; even as earth and nature permit the loveliest flowers to bloom amid decay and corruption.

There were devotees of Kybele in and around the three coast towns—Dardanos, Abydos, Perkote; priests also, among them one Teukrias, a native of Abydos. He was well known to Amyntor, who despised him heartily, but overcame his prejudice far enough to make Hylas known to him. He was tall, thin, and effeminate to a degree which nauseated Hylas; nevertheless his mind was quick and subtle, his influence profound.

As Hylas told him the story of Helle and the search upon which he had engaged Teukrias rubbed his chin, his keen eyes never still, a slight smile curving his thin mouth.

“How do you think I can help you?” he asked.

“It is possible that the child was given shelter by one of your creed. If so, doubtless you would have known of it.”

“Yes, I should have known of it.”

“She may still be in or about the place where she came ashore. Or she may have been taken elsewhere.”

“Both are possible. Or, of course, she may have died since.”

“Yes.”

After a short silence—

“If you were to find her,” Teukrias said, “what then?”

“I should restore her to her home.”

“She might not desire it.”

“I should try to persuade her; I admit that I might fail. But at least I should be able to tell her mother that she still lived; that I had found her safe and well.”

“That might or might not be a consolation to her mother.”

“Why should it not be so?”

Teukrias shrugged, but offered no explanation.

“If I knew where she was; if perhaps I knew that she served the Great Mother, why should I tell you where to find her? Kybele might lose a deeply devoted servant.”

“Kybele has many servants in Ilion, as I hear. She would scarcely grudge one whose return would bring such joy to her parents.”

“From what you tell me it seems that her parents parted with her easily enough. The Great Mother loves her children more fondly than that. She does not lightly let them go.”

“Then you can—or will—tell me nothing?”

Teukrias laughed; a soft, low, unpleasant laugh.

“I can only wish you success in your search. You can look for no help from me.”

Hylas began to lose patience with this painted, sneering echo of a man.

“At least you can tell me if you know nothing of her.”

“I could—if I were sure that I knew nothing. But I have known so many things, so many people: men and women, boys and girls. They come and go like winds in a tree, making their little stir for a moment, then losing themselves forever in the vastness of air. But the leaf, though idly stirred, has bent to the breeze; its shape has been changed, though never so slightly. How is it to tell which breath among so many bent it thus and thus?”

“The mind of a man like you is no insensate leaf. It has knowledge of causes—and memory of effects.”

Teukrias regarded Hylas more keenly.

“True. And the wit to know evil from good, and what is

best for this man and that. Heat and cold, sun and rain; some thrive, others wither and are lost."

"You speak in riddles to confuse me. That is unworthy of a man of your mind."

Teukrias laughed. "How I adore flattery!" he murmured. "You might find on Mount Ida what you seek; you may not. You come, I hear, from Merops?"

"Yes."

"He is a seer of some renown; can he not aid you?"

"No."

Teukrias shrugged. "It is an uncertain gift, this second sight. They say his daughter has it, too."

"Kleite? I had not heard——"

"Doubtless. It is an unwomanly attribute. Uncomfortable to live with. Lips that utter prophecies are not pleasant to kiss; and a mind that can read the future takes little joy in the present, however delightful. Or so I have found. I give you my views for what they are worth."

Hylas felt unqualified to debate the theme; neither had he the inclination. He wanted only to escape from the perfumed atmosphere of this exotic room; forget as soon as he could this travesty of a man, as he understood manhood.

Smiling slightly, Teukrias watched him go. But although he still smiled his eyes were deeply thoughtful as he went to an inner room. A beautiful woman upon a couch was idly plucking the strings of a small lyre; she looked up at him. Teukrias made a grimace.

"There, Athaleia, is a very dangerous young man," he remarked, sinking down beside her.

"Who?"

"One Hylas, sent to me by my friend and admirer Amyntor. He is embarking upon a search for a girl who has been lost for ten years. I wonder why?"

The girl put down the lyre with a sigh and lay back, white hands behind her dark head.

"Does it matter? Who is she?"

"Her name was Helle."

"Oh!"

There was a short silence.

"Will his search be successful, do you think?"

"It may or may not be. I suggested that he look for her on Mount Ida. It is possible that something may happen to him before he reaches the mountain. Or after, depending on what he finds there."

"Is that necessary?"

"I have not decided. If he leaves soon he will arrive in time for the autumn festival."

"To which you are going, are you not?"

"Naturally."

Athaleia laughed and crossed slender ankles.

"You're clever, Teukrias," she said. "But sometimes I wonder—"

"What do you wonder?"

"If at times you are a little too clever. Is this boy worth so much subtlety?"

"Who can tell?"

"Well, what does it matter? Is he good-looking?"

"Hylas? Very. But that need not interest you, my dear."

"It doesn't, much. I'm never likely to meet him, am I?"

"Not if I can prevent it," Teukrias told her grimly. Athaleia laughed and picked up her lyre.

"Is he as good-looking as that?" she asked; and began to play an idle air.

Fifteen

Nightfall found Herakles and Polyphemos far from the sea. Since leaving it they had followed the tracks of the unknown horsemen along the valley of a river. From the directness of their course it seemed as if those they followed were making for a known spot; a village or small town, or it might be a cluster of primitive huts or even caves on a mountain side. There was no means of telling what kind of men they were.

Herakles killed and skinned a small deer while Polyphemos made a fire; they camped in a small deep gorge so that their smoke should not betray them to those whom they pursued. But Herakles sighed at the delay.

"We do not know why they abducted him, nor how serious the wound which put him in their power," he said. "They must have some purpose, to have carried him so far."

"If they have carried him thus far," Polyphemos said.

Herakles was silent. The same doubt had assailed him. He had assumed that Hylas had been carried off by the horseman for lack of other evidence showing what might have become of him; but as they journeyed farther and farther from the scene of the attack his wonderment increased that anybody should thus burden himself unless impelled by some powerful motive. What that motive could be was beyond his conjecture. Almost he was in mind to return before it was too late and look more carefully for other, slighter signs that might give a different interpretation to what he already knew. If this failed and he was driven to conclude that Hylas had in fact been carried into the heart of the mountains he could still return; he would have no difficulty in remembering the way back to this place.

Yet the delay might make a world of difference. Hylas might die of his wound for lack of skilled care, or be passed on into other hands beyond possibility of being followed and rescued.

"We will go on," he decided.

Soon after leaving the gorge next morning, while skirting a height above a narrow plain, they saw a single rider galloping behind a herd of small deer. He was a short, thickly-built man with long black hair and a thin beard and was dressed in skins. His pony was small, fast and obviously well trained; for as it rapidly closed with the flying herd its rider dropped the bridle and controlled it at full gallop with his knees while he raised his bow and loosed an arrow. A young buck fell; the horseman dismounted, flung it over his pony's back and was soon cantering along the valley in the direction from which he had first appeared.

Herakles looked at Polyphemos significantly.

"I think after all that we are on the right road," he said. And they pressed forward, watchful for further signs of those whom they had come so far to find.

They came quite suddenly upon the encampment; a group of twenty tents or more of hide, clearly those of wanderers. A fire was burning, about which women moved; a few small

naked children screamed and tumbled in play among the tents. A number of cattle were grazing contentedly; a man was descending a slope, bent beneath a load of newly-cut faggots. Other men sat about idly, watching one who was busy about the carcase of the deer.

There was no sign of Hylas, nor a guard at any tent in which he might have been lying.

"Do you wait here while I go forward," Herakles said. "Have an arrow on the string and watch what goes on behind me."

Twirling his spear he strode down the slope and made for the group of men, who stared in obvious amazement at his great stature and strange manner of dress. They scrambled to their feet uncertainly, though none raised a weapon. Herakles fronted them and looked from one dark wondering face to another.

"Who is chief among you?" he demanded. They stared uncomprehendingly, and one spoke, but in a tongue unknown to Herakles.

"Chief," Herakles repeated. "Headman. King. Ruler. Father."

The wood-carrier, having dropped his load by the fire, had hurried to the circle about Herakles. As the stranger spoke he pressed forward, grinning and eager.

"King," he said, in a gutteral distortion of Herakles' own tongue and pointing to one of the tribesmen. "He king."

Slowly, painfully, Herakles made known through this halting interpreter the reason for his arrival among them. It seemed that in his youth the man had visited one of the settlements where Achaian immigrants had made a home and had learned a few words of their speech. An unreliable memory and more than one original misapprehension of meaning made his services of doubtful value, but there was no better and Herakles persevered. Laboriously he built up in the man's mind a picture of the meeting of the tribesmen with a solitary horse by the seacoast; this at last, with many nods and a satisfied grin he acknowledged. But when Herakles spoke of a rider and one whom he carried with him the man's eyes grew bewildered and he shook his head.

"No man," he said. "Horse. No man."

"One, two men," Herakles persisted.

"No man. No two man, no one man. No man. Horse."

Herakles began to frown and play with his spear.

"One man my friend," he said. "I look for my friend."

The interpreter was clearly unfamiliar with the word friend. Herakles tried again.

"Brother—comrade—"

Still no response. Then, in despair—"King. My king."

The man looked still more astonished.

"No man on horse," he asserted firmly. "We hunt by sea. Horse come. We catch. We have horse. No man on horse."

He turned then and spoke to his fellows; they, too, looked puzzled and shook their heads. Herakles regarded them intently. If they were lying surely one at least, by over-emphasis or a knowing look, would betray himself. But although they were a rough, villainous-looking set he could not detect among them the least sign of hidden knowledge, nor any attempt to deceive. On the contrary; from the first their manner had been respectful and propitiatory, as if Herakles had been a god come among them. They seemed genuinely anxious to help him if it lay in their power.

He signed to Polyphemos and explained how matters stood. Together they examined the horse which the interpreter readily pointed out to them as being the one they had followed; after a glance at its hooves Herakles knew that they were not lying in this. There was no sign of blood upon its coat, such as might have been expected had it carried an injured man for so great a distance. As a last recourse Herakles demanded that he might look inside the tents; to this no objection was raised, but he knew before he began that he would find nothing.

"He is not here," he said to Polyphemos, "nor do I believe that these are his attackers. Probably he was set upon by some solitary mountain man, who slew him for the sake of the knife he carried."

"Yet the horse—?"

"Stolen from some coast place; Kyzikon, or even Perkote. It was loosely tied to the tree; won free and made for home while the thief was lying in wait for one of us to go alone to

the spring. It was by chance that Hylas fell to him; it might have been you or I. Polyphemos, some voice inside me whispers that I shall not see Hylas again."

Polyphemos had nothing to say. He had come to that conclusion long before.

"What shall we do now?"

"We cannot rejoin Iason. We will return to Achaia."

"I am of the same mind."

They were given food by the tribesmen, who seemed sympathetic, friendly, eager to keep among them these strangers with weapons so wonderful; whose clothes and speech and stature might have been those of gods. A tent, too, was made for them, of which they were glad enough; they slept by turns, not knowing how far the dark men could be trusted. But no attempt was made upon them; rather was their tent avoided, either through a delicacy unexpected in people so primitive or because it was thought that these fair-skinned strangers were more than men.

When Herakles by word and sign made it known that he and Polyphemos meant to return to the coast by the way they had come, there to take a ship for their own land, the interpreter shook his head.

"No ship there," he said, pointing to the north; then, moving the direction of his outstretched arm south-westward: "Ship there."

Herakles considered. He knew little of the geography of Ilion; but Polyphemos touched his arm.

"He is right," he said. "We should not find a ship this side of Abydos; but in the south there is a port from which we might sail. I know Antandros well; it lies at the foot of Mount Ida."

At his words the interpreter broke in excitedly.

"Ida," he said. "We go Ida. Go see Kybele. You go Ida, find Antandros. Find ship. You go with us."

Herakles looked at Polyphemos.

"Well, why not?" he said.

* * *

Merops of Perkote was dismayed to perceive that after the

departure of Hylas his daughter's spirits drooped again. He had hoped that the impression the boy had made upon her would have had a more lasting effect; indeed, he had thought more than once that Hylas might in time replace dead Kyzikos in her wounded heart. Unless he had misjudged her he felt sure that she had conceived a deep tenderness for the young Achaian; had there been any talk of marriage he would gladly have given his consent, for beneath Hylas' untried youth he had discerned an awakening manhood and lofty spirit from which he augured well. Also he had learned the story of Hylas' lineage and the kingship that awaited him should he choose to claim it; he remembered the inspiration which at the time of his daughter's birth had promised her a crown. Perhaps ill-starred Kyzikos had not been the king who should thus elevate her. Perhaps, after all, it was Hylas for whom she had been destined.

If so, Kleite seemed remarkably unresponsive. She had been at all times friendly and kind; but as a sister. She spoke now of Hylas without constraint and affectionately; yet Merops had a feeling that for some unexplained reason she was deliberately restraining whatever impulses of love Hylas might have aroused in her. Why was she doing this? What dark barrier had she erected in her mind against the happiness that might so easily have come to her? For Merops had no doubt that Hylas loved her; his adoration was clear to see.

It had to do with Kyzikos, of course. It was too soon for his memory to have become even dimmed. Yet Merops felt that Kleite's silence was not all that of grief. She had known little of Kyzikos; less, except for one night in his house, than of Hylas. For Merops had himself arranged this marriage, choosing in the light of his wisdom a man suited in years and lineage to the daughter he loved, taking for granted her acceptance of his choice. Love, as he had often seen, came better after marriage; a more enduring love than that of hot young blood, caring nothing beyond the desirable present. There had been no lack of ardour on the part of Kyzikos; and though Kleite had said little—which was to be expected from one so maidenly modest—she had gone to her wedding without apparent reluctance.

What, then, was the real reason for this silence? If Kyzikos had somehow failed to win her love she would surely have regarded his death as a release from bondage. It could hardly be that; for her manner was far from being that of one who rejoices, even secretly. Nor was she grieving for the loss of one whom she had loved.

So Merops' thoughts turned full circle again and again, bringing him no nearer discovering what was in his daughter's mind than if he had never begun. To ask her was useless; she would smile, rouse herself for a little while and put his questions aside with evasions. Even from these he could deduce nothing.

Perhaps when Hylas came back from this search he would melt the gloom which lay on Kleite's mind and dissipate it forever. Merops had an increasing conviction that Hylas would be a masterful young man, not lightly to be turned aside from his purpose. If he set his mind on winning Kleite's love, Merops could not think that he would fail.

An idea came to him. He sent for Damia.

That enterprising young woman had lived somewhat retired since her dramatic return to Perkote. She had said nothing in the town of her pursuit of Hylas and the circumstances of their meeting, nor had Merops made public the story of her attack upon the boy. It was taken, then, that she had brought him, injured as he was, to Perkote from Kyzikon, and there were not lacking those who ascribed his abandonment of the expedition to a passion for Damia which had exhausted itself on that journey. Damia was not fool enough to enlighten the gossips, preferring to be pitied as a discarded fancy than execrated as a would-be murderer.

She had not tried, however, to hide the truth from Merops; it was from her lips that he had heard the whole story, which Hylas afterwards confirmed. The boy would have said nothing of it had not Merops shown clearly that he knew it all. Even then he laid no blame on Damia, finding excuse and justification for what she had done and stressing the care she had taken of him during the time of his helplessness. This further increased Merops' respect for him.

He did not know how nearly Hylas had once come to killing

Herakles, for a not dissimilar reason; how much the experience had deepened his understanding and widened his sympathy.

Damia's curiosity was greater than her reluctance to obey the summons, though she came to the house of Merops not knowing if she was to be rated or forgiven. Whatever she had expected it surprised her to find Merops so affable and confidential.

It was no part of the old man's intention to set Damia as a spy upon Kleite's thoughts, nor to penetrate for him the secret of her silent depression. He merely said that since the death of Kyzikos his daughter had been brooding far too much; suggested that the old friendship between the two girls would perhaps be restored and strengthened by their common suffering, and hoped that Damia would visit the house frequently with the object of cheering Kleite's spirits and her own.

Damia was shrewd enough to see that his thoughts were all for Kleite; that had her grief alone been in question he would have left her to brood. But it suited her to be known in Perkote as a welcome visitor to the house that had sheltered Hylas. Also she looked forward to hearing his name and talking about him to Kleite.

Which was exactly what the old philosopher had in view. In talking of Hylas to Damia Kleite would be brought to think more of him and less of the secret that troubled her. Imperceptibly, he hoped, she would be led to watch for his return, receive him with kindness when he came, and in the end respond to the love that he would no doubt lose little time in declaring. Merops cared nothing that he might never know what shadow had lain upon his daughter's spirit; he was concerned only to know it completely and finally dissipated.

Anticipating some little constraint between the two girls at their first meeting since the arrival of Hylas, Merops arranged that they should join a small pleasure-party to the seashore with three daughters of a friend of his who knew Damia's father. On this occasion Damia was so pleasant and unassuming that Kleite added her own warm entreaties to her father's that Damia should visit them a day or two later.

Damia was flattered and pleased; in a short time all that had estranged the two girls melted away in the warmth of a

new-found and genuine affection; and Merops rejoiced to hear his daughter's laughter again in the house which had been silent too long.

But they did not speak of Hylas; Kleite because a natural delicacy prevented her from mentioning a name bound up with so many unhappy memories, Damia in fear of recalling to Kleite that in intention at least she had been a murderer. This had been forgiven her; she wanted it now to be forgotten.

One factor which drew them closer together than ever before was their common devotion to Kybele. This Damia had first learned at Kyzikon, where the cult was strong; Kleite from her father who, ignoring the baser aspects of the creed, paid homage to the spirit of universal motherhood symbolised by the goddess.

Kleite had never seen a festival. Damia had attended more than one, and described vividly the procession of the Korybantes to Kybele's shrine, which had aroused in her highly emotional nature a positive ecstasy of fervour.

"They say that it is in memory of Atys, a mortal whom Kybele loved, whose name the high priest always bears," she explained. "Kybele made him swear eternal celibacy, but he yielded to the charms of a nymph; in a moment of passion Kybele killed and dismembered him. She was so frantic with grief for what she had done that she filled the whole earth with her lamentations; the wild, delirious cries and gestures of the Korybantes, as her priests are called, are the echo of her grief and repentance."

Kleite had heard nothing of this, for Merops regarded the enactment of the Sorrow of Kybele as the debasement of a sacred mystery which, above the understanding of the common people, had become for them an excuse for the loosing of all restraint and the exhibition of human nature at its lowest. He had therefore kept his daughter ignorant of the rites and customs attaching to the worship of the goddess in her mountain shrines, leading her to an understanding only of what was exalted and good in the reverencing of nature, beauty and love.

Damia, from a much lower mental plane, considered that Merops was denying his daughter a spectacle which she would doubtless enjoy and, as a professed devotee of the goddess,

should in duty attend. Kleite was less certain. If her father had passed over this aspect of the creed he probably had good reason; she trusted his judgment before that of Damia. Nevertheless she was curious. . . .

"It will soon be the time of the autumn festival," Damia said. "They say that on Mount Ida the ceremonies far surpass those of Kyzikon. Can you not persuade your father to let you see them?"

"Are you going?"

"I am. There are many in Perkote who mean to make the journey; we shall travel together, joining with others from Abydos and Dardanos on the way."

"I will ask him," Kleite said, though doubtfully.

But Merops flatly forbade his daughter to join the worshippers, and although Kleite was slightly disappointed at missing the novelty of the expedition, she was in a sense relieved. Damia had stressed the spectacular and sensational aspect so strongly that Kleite had been repelled; to her delicate and sensitive perceptions it seemed that the high and exalted might be overshadowed by the base almost to extinction. She had, moreover, no need of such stimulus to deepen her faith and devotion.

Damia shrugged, laughed and departed. Kleite sat in the now lonely garden, wondering how Hylas was faring in his search. Though they had seldom mentioned his name Kleite had thought often of him since her new attachment to Damia; for she could not forget the days and nights he had spent in her company, and knew that he was often in Damia's thoughts. Her very repression of the desire to speak of him caused her to think of him more.

Merops' plan seemed to be in a fair way toward succeeding.

But there was still that dark secret troubling Kleite's mind which Merops nor Damia nor Hylas could lift. And the poor tormented spirit poured itself out in passionate prayer, while Hylas and Damia went their different ways, all unknowing how and where they should meet again.

Sixteen

Unsatisfactory though the result of his interview with Teukrias had been, Hylas came away from it strengthened in his conviction that sooner or later he would discover the fate of Helle, alive or dead. Instinct more than reason told him that Teukrias had not revealed all he knew. He could have had little motive in concealing complete ignorance; the very fact of his evasiveness indicated that somewhere in his memory some echo of the incident, some recollection of the lost child still lingered. Perhaps he could not remember what had become of her and was unwilling to help Hylas in tracing her until he was assured that he would not be adversely affected by her discovery; for it was clear that he was a man of many secrets, no doubt discreditable.

So much Hylas had known before visiting the priest; Amyntor had told him that the household of the unmarried Teukrias was notorious through the three towns. But one reference Hylas remembered and thought much about; Teukrias had said that on Mount Ida he might or might not find that which he sought.

Why had the priest said that? Deliberately to mislead him, direct his search far from where it might succeed? Or, out of vanity, to give an impression of inner knowledge of the matter where in fact no such knowledge was his? Or had it been an accidental revelation of the truth? Or the truth and no accident?

Teukrias was subtle; his subtlety might take many forms. It might amuse such a nature as his to tell Hylas the truth, in such manner as to make him doubt it and assume that wherever else Helle might be she would not be found on Mount Ida.

Again—although from his judgment of the man Hylas regarded this as improbable—Teukrias might have given that clue as an honest attempt at assistance. One thing, however, was clear; he must visit the mountain. It was the only material help given him in all his talk with Teukrias, whatever motive lay beneath its mention. Truth or lie, it had to be proved such; also he did not know what more he could do in Abydos.

Pielos had no patience with these laboured reasonings.

"If she is on Mount Ida, why are we waiting here?" he demanded. "And if this Teukrias knows more than he will say, why, there are ways of making unwilling men talk."

Hylas laughed. "Things are not done that way, Pielos. We will match his subtlety with simplicity and tenaciousness, working on what little we know and never resting until one thread after another of this web is loosed and set aside. We shall succeed, never fear; with or without the help of Teukrias."

But the words of Pielos had set up a new train of thought in Hylas' mind. He began to feel a deeper resentment at the way his questions had been evaded, himself mocked and dismissed none the wiser for his visit. His impulse was to leave at once for the mountain; but he had now an uncomfortable feeling that when Teukrias came to hear of it his smile would deepen a little. . . .

Hylas wondered how Herakles would have handled the matter. Would he have thus tamely submitted, left the house of the wily old priest without what he had come for, though with reason to suspect that the key to the puzzle lay in that tortuous mind? He doubted it. Somehow Herakles would have come at the truth. He would suffer no man to laugh at him, nor deny him what he wanted to know.

Yet Herakles was far from clever. He believed in simple directness of word and action; and his philosophy had always served him well.

"I begin to fear that I am very young," Hylas sighed, and reached for his spear. "We will go and talk to this man Teukrias again."

Pielos nodded approval.

"Beating the soles of the feet is well regarded," he observed, "also burning splinters thrust down the nails of fingers and toes. We shall need rope."

"That may come," Hylas told him gravely, "but for the moment we will content ourselves with merely a show of force."

A slave at the outer gate regarded them insolently through a grille.

"My master is not here," he said, "and I have orders to admit none in his absence."

"Indeed! And when is he expected to return?"

"A month, a day, a year; who can say?"

Hylas thanked him and turned away. Pielos caught his arm.

"Are we to leave it there?" he demanded. "Why, we are being laughed at!"

"The slave will not open the gate."

"What matter? Men such as you and I——"

"Could not easily force it; moreover he would send for help. Our purpose is to come to Teukrias, not to die, however gloriously. Have patience, Pielos."

Hylas laid a hand on the indignant young man's arm, smiled, and led him on a circuit of the high wall surrounding the garden in which the house was set. He halted beneath a tree and shook his head.

"Teukrias is badly served," he remarked. "See how the branches of this tree overhang the wall! Now, if anyone wished to set foot in that garden, Pielos, I can see little to stop him."

And with the agility of a seaman he began to climb the tree. Pielos stared. His mind was still thinking in terms of battering-rams. With a sigh for the degeneracy of the times he followed Hylas, however; within a short while they were at the door of the house.

The house-slave who opened the door at their somewhat imperative summons looked greatly alarmed at sight of their spears and the menacing scowl on Pielos' face. But Hylas' voice was quiet and pleasant as he asked to speak with Teukrias.

"He is not here."

"So I have already been told. I find it hard to believe."

"It is nevertheless true. And strangers are not admitted in his absence."

"That also I learned at the gate. Yet, as you see, here we are."

"You shall come no farther!"

"Indeed!"

As the man closed the door Hylas lifted the haft of his spear

and inserted it between leaf and jamb. Then with a quick heave of his shoulder he flung the door back upon the astonished slave and strode into the pillared hall, Pielos at his heels.

"My business is important," Hylas explained, still in that quiet, dispassionate tone. "I would speak with your master."

"He is not here," the slave answered sullenly. Pielos frowned and drew a knife. The slave turned pale.

"Then desire whoever gives orders in his absence to come and tell me so," Hylas said.

"If you will wait here——"

Hylas smiled.

"Oh, no! It is so easy to forget a message; or to linger babbling with one's friends. We will come with you."

The slave hesitated, glancing from one to the other. At that moment a curtain was put aside by a small white hand and a beautiful young woman appeared in a doorway.

"What is this, Leukos?" she demanded. "Who are these people?"

Hylas made a courteous salutation. It was clear that he was in the presence of one having authority.

"I wish to speak with Teukrias," he said, "but there seems to be some reluctance on the part of your servants to let him bear his part in the conversation."

"And who might you be, who force an entrance into an unguarded house?"

"As to that, the house is well enough guarded, except against men as determined as Pielos and myself. My name is Hylas."

"Oh!" The woman regarded him with more interest.

"And what is your business with Teukrias?"

"That I shall be glad to reveal to him when he appears."

"He is not here."

"I am beginning to believe it; for otherwise he would no doubt be standing between you and armed intruders, would he not?"

"Insolent! Why should I not call men to fling you from his house?"

"You have probably gathered that the importance of my mission is such that I should be reluctant to leave without

fulfilling it." And Hylas, shifting his spear to his right hand, smiled pleasantly.

"You are bold. By my life, I have never known such effrontery!"

"You are meeting me, you perceive, for the first time."

"Teukrias shall hear of this!"

"There is nothing I desire more ardently. At once, if you will be so kind."

In spite of her rising indignation the woman laughed. Hylas stood impassively before her, as unmoved by this as by her anger.

"You know that Teukrias is a priest of Kybele?"

"Yes."

"And that the autumn festival will be held soon on Mount Ida?"

"I have heard rumours of it."

"Teukrias has already left. He has gone by way of Troy."

"Ah!"

"Are you convinced now?"

"Such lips as yours could never lie."

"Do you flatter me?"

"No; for your eyes would betray you."

"I should like Teukrias to hear you say that."

"I am more than ever anxious to meet him, in order to compliment him upon the beauty of his—house. I will seek him, then, in Troy; or, if I am too late arriving there, on Ida."

"You are very precipitate. Can you not await his return?"

"It is not necessary. I have no other idleness to detain me in Abydos."

"That is a pity."

"You think so?"

"You are not a devotee of Kybele?"

"No. I worship a goddess, but her name is—not Kybele."

"Ah! Well, the air of Mount Ida is said to be unhealthy for unbelievers, particularly at times of festival."

"You alarm me. Yet, as you see, I carry arms."

"What defence is a spear against pestilence, which slays as swiftly and unseen as an arrow, or a knife in the dark?"

"True. I will guard myself as I may against such pestilences; but I will not be turned aside from my purpose."

"Which is to find Teukrias?"

"As a means to an end. Where is Helle?"

Uttered in the same smooth, bantering tone with which he had conducted this conversation, Hylas' demand clearly caught the woman unprepared. A momentary expression of surprise, even fear, lit her dark eyes.

"Why do you ask me that? And who is this Helle?"

Hylas smiled. "The story would take too long now to tell," he replied. "Perhaps you can induce Teukrias to recount it when other matter is lacking."

"You speak in riddles."

"It must be the influence of this enigmatic house. Come, Pielos, we shall learn nothing more."

"We have learned nothing yet," Pielos grumbled. This verbal thrust and counterthrust left him bewildered. He could not understand why nobody had appeared to add good, strong action to the situation. But Hylas seemed satisfied; he was making his farewells.

"You have not told me your name," he was saying to the lovely young woman, who was regarding him curiously and with a marked lack of hostility.

"It may not be unknown to you."

"I have certainly heard of Aphrodite."

The young woman laughed, colouring slightly.

"You have an adroit tongue, Hylas; it should serve you well with the goddess whose name is—not Kybele. Mine is Athaleia."

"It shall be remembered, if only to arouse the jealousy of Teukrias."

"You will do well not to mention it to him."

"He is bound to learn of our encounter."

"It is so unimportant that it may easily pass from my mind before he returns."

"But your slaves will doubtless make their report."

Athaleia glanced at the house-slave who had withdrawn earlier beyond hearing.

"They are not encouraged to gossip. Also they have none

of them come so well out of the matter as to boast of it to the master whose house they so culpably failed to defend."

"Then, as you say, it would be unkind in me to bring their delinquency to his notice."

Athaleia laughed. "Farewell, Hylas," she said. "I wonder if I shall ever see you again?"

"If you and I both wished it, I cannot think who would succeed in keeping us apart."

Hylas and the woman exchanged a long glance. Then Athaleia nodded.

"I have no fears for you, Hylas," she said. "The gods are with you."

* * *

"Why did you waste so much time talking to a woman of that kind?" Pielos grumbled. "Clearly she knows nothing."

"On the contrary, she knows a great deal," Hylas replied. "More even than she told me."

"What did you learn from her?"

"That Teukrias knows where Helle is, and that he is afraid that I shall discover her; also that he intends to prevent it if he can, even if he has to arrange my assassination. Now tell me this, Pielos: why should a woman who has never seen me before, and owes me nothing, warn me against the man who keeps her in luxury and ease?"

"Probably because she liked your face. Any woman would who saw nobody but Teukrias from one year's end to the other."

Hylas laughed. "Is that why she doesn't want me to go to Mount Ida?"

"Perhaps she knows that Helle is there."

"Possibly; though her idea seemed to be that Teukrias was preparing something for me if I went: an arrow, or a knife in the dark."

"Ah! Well, that is a language with which we are familiar. We may even utter a word or two of our own."

"But she may have been schooled by Teukrias to say what she did. I wish I knew exactly how Teukrias had read me, Pielos. It is clear that either he wants or does not want me to go to Mount Ida."

Pielos began to laugh. Hylas went on seriously:

"I am convinced that he does not mean me to find Helle. If he wants me to go to Mount Ida it is because she is not there. If he doesn't want me to go there it's because she is."

"And one and one are two and two and two are four," Pielos said disgustedly. "Where is all this leading?"

"To Mount Ida."

Pielos shrugged. "Then why not have said so at first? Truly you seem to make mountains out of mist."

"A little mist can blot out mountains, Pielos, and I am stumbling in a bewildering fog. Stay a moment, Pielos: there is something I am in danger of forgetting. When I called on him yesterday there were no signs of his being about to leave. Yet he must have started quite early this morning. And—Pielos—the woman said that he is going to Mount Ida by way of Troy. That is not the direct route, is it?"

"By no means. It almost doubles the length of the journey."

"Ah! Now, I wonder why he is going to Troy? And if his decision to go there was in consequence of my visit? I would give much to know."

"He travels by litter. It is not yet noon. With good horses we could arrive before him."

"Amyntor has promised me horses at my need. Come, Pielos: we have wasted enough time in Abydos."

"And now we're going to waste some more. Why not straight to the mountain?"

"Because that's where Teukrias wants me to go."

Pielos made an impatient gesture.

"Why worry so much about what he wants?" he demanded. "Are we never to have a say in our own affairs?"

Hylas gave it up.

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A moderately good road connected Dardanos and Troy; by striking across country from Abydos they saved an hour or more and made good speed toward the greatest city in Ilion. Laomedon's Troy was a fine and well-defended city, though smaller and less powerful than that built by his son Priam in later days, where Paris was born and brave Hektor fought and died. The city crowned a height above the

leisurely Skamander and dominated the country to the west and north. From its walls could be seen, far to the south-east, the range of mountains from which Ida rose in tree-clad loveliness.

The sun had yet an hour or more to fall when Hylas and Pielos rode into the city by way of the northern gate. On the last stage of their journey they had watched carefully for Teukrias' horse-borne litter and had made more than one detour to pass unseen when they overtook bodies of horsemen making for Troy. From the walls they watched these little companies approach and examined them closely as they entered the gate. But Teukrias was not among them.

At sunset the gate was closed. Hylas and Pielos looked at one another.

"Either he arrived before we did," Hylas said, "or——"

"Or he isn't here at all?"

"Exactly. I am afraid, Pielos, that I have been tricked."

"Well, it's a small matter. To-morrow we will go to Ida."

"He will have had a day and a night there to arrange whatever is in his mind. He undoubtedly knows that we have come to Troy."

"Are you sure you aren't exaggerating his interest in our search?"

"Then why did Athaleia mislead us?"

Pielos snorted. "He may have told her that he was coming to Troy; she may have believed it. He may have reasons quite unconnected with us for cloaking his movements from her."

Amyntor, that man of many friends, had told them of a house in Troy where the mention of his name would ensure a welcome and comfortable lodgment. To this they went when, having asked at every gate, they felt that they could do no more, and found things as had been predicted.

As soon as the gates were opened at sunrise they resumed their journey.

They were not alone in making their way toward Ida; as they drew near the mountain they passed several groups of country people and more than one cavalcade of townsfolk making pilgrimage to take part in the autumn festival of

Kybele. None, however, were travelling with the urgency of Hylas, nor did any pass him on the road.

In the early evening they began to ascend the lower slopes of the mountain.

Ida's beauty has been sung in many lands, and not unjustly. Verdure and falling water, wrought in every exquisite combination, delight the eye and give peace to the spirit. There are those who claim it as the earliest home of Aphrodite, most lovely of goddesses; be that as it may, the mountain of its own beauty is the pride and symbol of Ilion. Little wonder, then, that those who worshipped Kybele gave the fruitful goddess a home in its solitudes.

Hylas was deeply impressed. His quick eye took in the grandeur and majesty of the mountain less as an object of wonder, however, than as a background to the peril he apprehended from Teukrias. Since their setting out from Troy he had watched for a possible ambush, regarding each group of people he had passed with alert suspicion and avoiding as far as possible dense cover or overhanging ledges. These had been infrequent; but as the ground began to rise more steeply an occasional risk of this sort had to be taken; and he redoubled his watchfulness.

It was well that he was keenly alert. As they passed along a shallow gorge an arrow hissed over his head. He and Pielos dismounted between the horses, as they had previously arranged, using them for cover while they waited for the attack to develop.

"That arrow came from our left front," Hylas said. "If I know Teukrias there will be more than—Ah! I thought so!"

Another arrow, this time from the other side of the gorge, had skidded past Pielos' horse.

"Poor marksmen," Hylas remarked calmly. "Teukrias is badly served. There is little wind, and—There! Three shafts, and none within a pace of us. What sort of archers are these?"

"Good enough for my liking," Pielos growled. "I do not care to be made the target of an unseen foe. Why do we not ride back and seek another route?"

"The other paths may be similarly guarded. Mark, Pielos, where that tree stirs, though no wind moves it. Do you see

the gleam at its foot? Now, it would be a poor thing if Anchises' bow could not carry my greeting to Teukrias that far. But first we will walk, slowly, between the horses, and see if our passage is denied. It may be that—Down, Pielos!"

An arrow sang wickedly, grazing a horse's back so that it reared and pawed. Pielos held it; in the flurry Hylas fitted an arrow to the string of his bow. The pale gleam showed again as a man's face peered between parted leaves. The black bow hummed a deep note . . .

"There are at least two others," Hylas said, "both on one side of the valley. If we ride close to him who will shoot no more, their shafts will not reach us. Mount, Pielos, and at the gallop!"

They had to chance that there might be another archer on the left side of the gorge who had not yet revealed himself. Crouching low they galloped forward, and two arrows from the farther side came dangerously close; but there was no other Bowman, and they reached the end of the gorge in safety.

When he felt sure that they were out of sight Hylas halted and turned aside into a small cleft; silently he dismounted and signed Pielos to tether the horses.

"What are we going to do now?" Pielos asked.

"I am curious; I should like to have speech with those who seem to like us so little."

"Ah!"

"Lie here; we can see the slopes on which they were hidden. Watch for moving branches."

For a long time their attackers made no sign, and Hylas began to fear that they had gone away by another path. He was hoping that they would go to the aid of the third man on the opposite side; to reach him, unless they made a wide detour, they would be bound to come within arrowflight.

Almost he had decided to wait no longer when they appeared, creeping cautiously toward the wall of the gorge. They lay for awhile upon its edge, scanning the upper end of the declivity through which Hylas and Pielos had escaped. Assured apparently that they were gone the two men scrambled down the slope and ran for the other side.

Hylas sighed for their folly as he rose and loosed two arrows

in quick succession. One after the other the two men stumbled and fell, each with a shaft in his thigh.

"Let us talk with them," Hylas said; and with ready spears he and Pielos approached the cursing men. Hylas surveyed them grimly.

"Why should I not kill you?" he demanded. The man at his feet tried to rise, tugging at a knife in his belt. Hylas put the point of his spear to the man's chest.

"Have you no fear of Kybele, that you seek to kill those who journey to her shrine?" he went on. "Such sacrilege deserves no mercy from gods or men. It would be only right to slay you, that others coming this way might pass unmolested." And he poised his spear.

"Stop! You don't know all!"

"I know enough."

"Listen! We were set to watch for you, and you only."

"I? Who am I, to arouse any man's enmity? A fine tale! Who do you say, then, set you to slay me?"

"A priest of Kybele. He swore that we should ~~come~~ to no harm; that at the first attack you would turn back."

"He must know little of us, this priest of yours, to think that my friend or I would be frightened by such sorry archers as you!" And Hylas laughed scornfully.

The man's fists opened and closed as if eager to be about Hylas' throat.

"Lucky for you that we are bowmen of some skill," he choked. "We aimed not to kill, but to miss narrowly."

Pielos grunted. "Strike and be done," he said to Hylas. "It grows late; others may be lying in wait for us."

Hylas ignored him. He was frowning down at the man at his feet.

"What did Teukrias promise you if you turned us back?"

"He said that he would. . . . Who spoke of Teukrias, or any man?"

"I did."

Hylas' gaze bored down into the glowering face. The man avoided his eyes, obviously disconcerted. The other looked up from the thigh he was roughly bandaging with a strip torn from his tunic.

"Why deny it?" he growled. "That cursed priest and his smooth promises. . . . I shall be laid aside for days with this wound; and my brother is dead. Cursed be all priests, and most especially Teukrias!"

Hylas turned to Pielos with a smile.

"Do you still think I exaggerate his interest in our search?" he asked.

But Pielos was looking about him anxiously.

"We should do well to gain the cover of those trees," he said. "We are too good a mark in the open."

Hylas laughed, and led the way back to the horses.

An hour later they dismounted safely among those who had come to worship Kybele.

Seventeen

Earlier in the day of Hylas' arrival on Mount Ida a company of men and women, numbering a hundred or more, had made an encampment near the shrine of Kybele; they were those who had come from the three coast towns, travelling together for the latter part of the journey. Among them was Damia.

While the men drew water and found wood for a fire the women busied themselves with food, blankets and the like; a holiday mood prevailed and each bore a willing share in the work. Priests of Kybele moved among the people, giving them welcome in the name of Kybele and talking of the coming festival.

There were other encampments on the mountainside; people had been assembling from towns, villages and remote places in every part of Ilion, for although there were other centres of worship, the fame of the shrine on Ida eclipsed them all. When they had eaten and seen to their arrangements for the night, therefore, people moved from one encampment to another in all friendliness, greeting folk they knew or acquaintances of earlier visits and exchanging the accumulated gossip of half a year. Kybele's festivals occurred in spring and autumn; the latter was more popular, being at a time when

the harvest was gathered in and men's minds were inclined toward gratitude and praise.

As the shadows began to lengthen on the plain Damia felt a touch on her arm; a woman took her hand and led her to a cave, from the darkness of which a tall, thin man emerged. Damia made an obeisance; she had recognised Teukrias, the priest of Abydos.

"Greetings, Damia," he said, "and in the name of Kybele, welcome to her festival."

Damia murmured some response; she was awed by this man, whose power and influence were well known even in Perkote. But Teukrias made her easy with pleasant words.

"I have sent for you," he told her, "because a young man in whom I am interested is known to you. His name is Hylas."

Damia felt herself colouring.

"I knew him for a short while," she replied, "but he has gone from Perkote. I do not know if I shall ever see him again."

"It is possible that you may meet him quite soon. I have reason to believe that he is on his way here."

"Oh! I did not know that he was a believer."

"Understand me: it is not out of devotion that he comes this way. He is searching for one who was lost as a child ten years ago. She was an Achaian girl; her name was Helle."

"I have heard something of the matter in Perkote."

"Then I need not explain farther. Now, this Hylas appears to me to be a very single-minded and persistent young man. He will not abandon this search until he is assured that it is hopeless."

Damia raised her eyes to the priest's face.

"And—is it hopeless?" she asked.

"Unhappily, no. Helle is still alive, though in all Ilion I alone know where she is and by what name she goes. Hylas has never seen her, nor does he know anything of her appearance, even as a child. Unless I reveal my knowledge it is almost impossible that he will ever find her. But a miracle may happen; by some fantastic chance he may come upon the truth."

"You give the impression that you want to keep it from him."

"I will not hide from you, Damia, that I am most anxious to do so. But do not misjudge me; it is for his own sake that I would keep him in ignorance of the kind of woman this compatriot of his has become."

"Why?"

"Because he is young and idealistic. No doubt he visualises this lost child of an Achaian king as the heroine of such a tale as old men tell; fair, pure-souled, persecuted; awaiting a gallant deliverer from those who hold her in bondage. It would be a grievous pity that such romantic dreams should be shattered; for the truth is sordid and vile."

"Ah! And why are you telling me this?"

"Hylas came to my house in Abydos seeking my help. I admit that I was taken by surprise; in an unguarded moment I hinted that the woman he sought was here on the mountain. Now, although Hylas made it painfully clear that I fall far short of his conception of manhood, I felt a strange liking and respect for him—as I imagine a father must feel for a son, though that emotion has never been mine. And if it lies in my power I would save him from disillusion. Better for him to think her dead than see the living, pitiful reality."

"She is, in fact, here on the mountain?"

"At the moment, yes. And will play a part in the procession of the Korybantes."

"What danger is there that Hylas will know her for the woman he is seeking?"

"I do not know. But in a moment of hysteria she may let some word slip. I have a high respect for the young man's shrewdness. A very little would suffice to put him on the road that would lead, as I believe, to a spiritual hurt from which he might not easily recover."

"I still do not know why you are telling me this."

"You are very well known to Hylas, Damia. I ask your help in keeping him from the woman he seeks; I ask you to engage his attention, watch if he chances upon some hint of the truth, and draw him away."

"Why should I do this? What is it to me?"

"This, Damia: whatever the result of his search—whether he finds Helle alive or is brought to believe her dead—when

his quest is ended he will return to his own land, and we of Ilion shall see him no more."

"Ah!"

"I pry into no secrets, Damia; though a man in my position learns much that is hidden from others. Shall we say, then, that Hylas' departure from Ilion would be a matter for regret to—many?"

"Not least to Kleite, the daughter of Merops."

Damia regretted the words as she uttered them. This was a secret which she had quickly penetrated in her new association with her old friend. But Teukrias smiled.

"Among others, no doubt," he said indifferently. "But I am not interested in those others. In return for the help I ask of you I can promise nothing; but I am not without power, and Kybele is kind to those who serve her well. My prayers will rise to the Great Mother ceaselessly; it would be a strange thing if you were not some day to come to your heart's desire—whatever that may be."

Damia regarded him thoughtfully; the priest met her considering gaze with a slight smile. The girl had little doubt that Teukrias had reasons other than those he had given for wishing to hide Helle from discovery, but this meant little to her. Of more moment was the consideration that in consenting to mislead Hylas—and what harm in that?—she would earn the gratitude of a man whom she sincerely believed capable of winning Hylas to her arms. And clearly he had a very good idea of what her heart's desire would be.

Feeling oddly excited—

"Will you point out the woman to me, that I may know her?" Damia said.

"She is here. Come with me."

Teukrias stood aside, smiling. For a moment Damia hesitated, fearing she knew not what. Then, with a shrug and a toss of her dark head, she went with him into the cave.

* * *

A family from Perkote made room for Hylas and Pielos in their tent. Hylas went straight to sleep, but Pielos lay wakeful, listening; starting up at every footfall—of which there were

many, though other than those of would-be assassins. There was also a good deal of low talk and stifled laughter in the earlier part of the night; but silence gradually came down on the camp and Pielos, too, fell asleep.

He was somewhat astonished next morning to find himself and Hylas still alive.

After they had bathed and eaten they visited other encampments, wondering at the multitude that had gathered from so many near and far-off places to pay homage to a deity unknown except by name to Hylas. Rich and powerful people from Troy and Dardanos mixed with rough, uncultured countryfolk, some of whom could speak no word of the speech of the cities. Hylas regarded these primitive tribesmen with especial interest; they were unlike any he had seen in Achaia. They seemed almost childishly excited, grinning and jabbering to each other, pointing out people in costumes strange to them and gathering eagerly about them to feel the texture of their clothes and wonder at their weapons. Their curiosity was suffered with amused tolerance; the festival lowered all barriers between rich and poor, cultured and primitive, under the benign eye of the Great Mother whose effigy looked out from a cave upon her assembled worshippers.

A wide path wound downhill from the holy cave to a thick woodland, from which came a muffled noise of drums softly beaten in a slow monotonous rhythm. Worshippers came hurrying from their encampments; the ceremonies were about to begin. As they lined the path, looking expectantly down the hill to the wood where the priests were assembled, Hylas found himself near a short, dark tribesman carrying a spear with a bronze head at which Hylas stared intently. It was of Achaian workmanship; he wondered how it had come into the man's possession, for such things were rare in Ilion, even in the coast towns that traded with Achaia.

Hylas moved closer, feeling an odd sense of familiarity with the stout haft of the spear. He felt sure that he had seen it before, handled it. He touched the man's arm.

"That is a fine spear," he remarked. The man grinned and nodded vigorously, delighted to be spoken to by one of Hylas' race.

"Fine spear, yes. Fine spear." And he looked at it with eyes that shone with proud pleasure. "Big man spear," he added.

The pulse of the drums still hidden in the wood was quickening; the dull clash of cymbals began. The crowds lining the path stirred expectantly.

"Big man?" Hylas repeated.

"Yes. I big man now." And the tribesman laughed.

"I have seen that spear before."

The man looked puzzled; his knowledge of Hylas' tongue was clearly elementary. Hylas tried again.

"I know big man spear," he said. "I know big man."

"You know big man?" The dark face became radiant.

"You big man friend? You—Hylas?"

Hylas felt his heart give a great leap.

"I am Hylas. Big man—Herakles?"

"Yes! Yes, yes, yes! Herakles, yes!"

"Where is he now? Where is Herakles?"

The man had turned to look down toward the wood. To the noise of drums and cymbals was now added the clash of spears on brazen shields; a weird cry shivered among the trees and the crowd was suddenly silent. Hylas seized the tribesman's wrist.

"Herakles: where?" he demanded. The man glanced back at him.

"Go find ship," he replied. "Go home." The noises from the wood were of more concern to him at the moment. The cries were increasing; drums, cymbals and spears were beating out a confused din, and amid the trees the first of the Korybantes could be seen.

Hylas drew his knife and put it to the man's armpit.

"Tell," he said tersely. "Tell of big man; how come spear."

The man looked startled.

"Big man follow horse," he said hastily. "Look for friend on horse. Horse come, we find horse. No man on horse. Big man find us, no find friend. Big man sad, say friend Hylas dead. Go home. We go Ida, see Kybele. Big man come, we show find ship. Big man give spear, go find ship Antandros. We go Ida, see Kybele, no see big man no more."

The head of the procession was emerging from the wood.

The high priest, dressed as a woman, was gesturing and wailing as if in a frenzy of grief; behind him the lesser priests screamed and cried, while the cymbals and drums beat a frantic medley of maddening noise. A groan arose from the watchers, swelling as the Korybantes stumbled and gestured and wailed along the upward path.

But Hylas stood staring at the tribesman, realising for the first time that Herakles had not sailed on with the *Argo* but had remained in Ilion to search for him. A bitter curse broke from his lips at Damia's duplicity; she had known, but kept it from him. From the tribesman's brief account he had at once understood the truth of Herakles' pursuit of the horse, and grieved that Herakles thought him dead. If he had known; if only he had known! And now Herakles was returning home, having thrown away his part in the quest; and Hylas knew, as perhaps no other could know, what anxiety of love must have kept him from it; the venture of which in all but name he was leader, the moving spirit, the high indomitable heart.

Slowly the priests advanced; the noise became deafening, while the people moaned and wept. Behind the wildly gesturing priests came a group of women, dishevelled, weeping in a frenzied hysteria of grief, beating their breasts and lifting appealing hands to the skies; with other gestures of less immediate connection with the sorrow of Kybele which indicated the extent to which their emotions had been released from normal restraint. Among these a fair young woman with a loose mouth exceeded all others in the extreme of her abandon; Hylas turned away sickened and disgusted. If this was how the goddess was worshipped, she was no goddess for him. In the extravagance of their gestures, with their glittering, staring eyes and foaming lips the women were as if drunken with more than wine; maddened, crazed, they shrieked and screamed the sorrow of Kybele for Atys slain and lost.

The effect of these women upon the crowd was even greater than that of the priests; their frenzy seemed dynamic, impelling the watchers to add their voices to the clamour. Men and women joined the procession, tears streaming down their contorted faces as they cried, wept, shrieked and gestured. Above it all the beating of spears on shields, the

clashing of the cymbals and the thudding of the drums spurred them on to wilder frenzy. The dark tribesmen were sobbing and trembling, their eyes glassy, their limbs twitching; as the women passed them they, too, flung themselves into the shrieking, straggling line.

Suddenly Hylas stiffened and darted into the crowd; his hand closed upon the waving arm of a young woman with unbound hair and a tear-streaked, sun-brown face. She looked at him glassily, her eyes wild, unseeing, delirious; there was foam at the corners of her sagging mouth.

“Damia!” Hylas shouted. “Damia!”

“Atys! Atys is dead!”

Hylas shook her arm impatiently.

“Have done with this hysterical mummary, Damia,” he said, shouting to be heard above the tumult.

“Atys the beautiful! Atys is dead, dead!”

Hylas uttered a curse upon Atys and all false gods; he slapped Damia’s cheek so that she started back whitening; the frenzied glow died in her brown eyes and she stared at Hylas as if awaking from sleep.

“You—you struck me,” she said bewilderedly, a hand to her cheek. She was trembling, breathless, her breast rising and falling beneath her torn and disordered dress. Hylas caught her arm and drew her from the demented crowd into the comparative quiet of a thicket by the path.

“Damia, listen to me! I have just learned that Herakles stayed behind to search for me. You knew that, didn’t you?”

Slowly the girl nodded, her eyes on his.

“Why did you tell me that he had gone with the rest?”

“I told you only that he had gone. I did not say where, or with whom.”

“But you meant to deceive me. Why?”

“Because you hated him and—I loved you.”

“You lied to me, Damia!”

“Does it matter?”

“He gave up his hopes of high honour to look for me. He searched for me in wild places where he might have lost his life, caring nothing for these things, thinking only of me—unworthy that I am! Damia, it is in my heart to kill you!”

The girl's eyes flashed; something of their earlier madness lit in them.

"Kill me, then, and be done! But remember that I love you!"

"Love! Love such as yours is a degradation!"

Damia laughed recklessly, wildly; she threw her arms about him and pressed wet avid lips to his face.

"Nevertheless you shall love me," she said. "Kleite is not for you, nor could that thin-blooded prude ever make you happy. . . . Ah, Hylas, you will be happy with me, past all imagining!" And she strained close to him, panting.

With savage force Hylas tore her arms from his neck.

"Wanton—murderess—Ah, I hate and loathe you!" He flung her away and strode from her, blinded by emotions that shook and bewildered him. But Damia ran after him and caught his arm.

"You despise me because I am what I am," she panted, "an Ilian, a poor untutored girl of a small obscure town. You are an Achaian and proud of your blood. Well! these Achaians are not so very different, after all! They, too, can become wantons, degenerates . . . and worse."

"What do you mean?"

"Come with me; I will show you an Achaian girl from whom even the most depraved and vicious Ilian turns with loathing. An Achaian girl, whose name, though not her own, has been a by-word for all evil for ten years past."

Hylas began to tremble. Damia laughed in his face.

"Do you fear to look upon what I will show you?" she challenged. "Would you abandon the search for her whom you seek—before it is too late?"

"If you are mocking me, Damia, you shall die!"

"I mock you? I had it from the lips of Teukrias himself!"

The tumult of drums and clashing cymbals beat upon Hylas' brain; almost he shrieked and gibbered with the frenzied worshippers, now nearing the shrine. Damia laughed again, wildly, triumphantly, and seized his hand. Hylas summoned all the strength of his will; unresisting he allowed Damia to lead him to the group of women who followed close behind the priests.

"There!" she cried, pointing to the fair young woman

whose gestures and actions had sickened him when she had first passed by; who shrieked the most filthy obscenities and behaved with an unbridled licentiousness which shocked and nauseated him now. "There is one of your blood; there is the child that was lost; there is the woman you seek. There, Hylas, goes Helle!"

* * *

The procession had passed; the wailing had risen to a tempestuous climax and died away; drums and cymbals were still. Within the cave grotesquely-dressed priests offered sacrifice, intoning chants to the Mother-goddess enthroned and bedecked with the fruits of harvest. The worshippers, trembling still, knelt and lay about the shrine, offering prayer and praise to her by whom they lived.

Far down the path from the woodland a solitary figure lay upon the trampled grass, weeping uncontrollably. Hylas' dreams had fallen crashing into the bitter gulf of disillusion; the quest upon which he had built such glorious hopes had proved a mockery, its object a depraved obscenity beyond all hope of reclamation. In the blackness of his despair he remembered how Herakles had loved him; how he had nursed his hidden hate, repelling the love that had given so much, asked so little, and uncomplainingly suffered that little to be denied. He thought too of Kleite, whose love he could never hope to win, so high and pure and unattainable was she. In the disorder of his whirling thoughts these images, crowding one upon another, became confused, as if he dreamed; he pressed his hands to his head and cried aloud in mental torment.

Helle was a human monster. Kleite was not for him. Herakles thought him dead and would soon forget him. What was left? Where should he go, what do? Was life worth all this pain, trouble, frustration? Was it not an evil thing, made all of savagery and hate, lies, disillusion, despair? Would he not be better dead?

"Ah!" said the voice of Pielos. "I wondered where you had gone. What did you think of those capering monkeys and lewd women? I have never seen anything so silly."

Hylas slowly raised his head. Pielos sat down beside him, munching grapes with enjoyment.

"I thought I saw that girl Damia among them," Pielos said.
"You know, she's not altogether unattractive, is she?"

Hylas choked; a sobbing laugh broke from his lips. Then another, until he was laughing helplessly. Pielos glanced at him, flushing a little.

"Of course, I know that you—Well, I . . . Here, have some of these grapes," he said.

Hylas sat up and held out his hand.

"Do you know, Pielos," he said, "I think you've saved my life?"

Eighteen

The festival of Kybele occupied several days, but Hylas, having learned on the first day what he had come to Ida to know, departed early on the second day. He had not spoken with Teukrias, nor had he seen Damia again. He was in no mood for recriminations; it was with the apathy of disillusion that he journeyed back to Perkote.

He wondered, now, why he had allowed himself to become so powerfully affected by the revelations of Herakles' devotion and Helle's depravity. He might have expected the one, should have been prepared for the other. The contrast between them: Herakles so fine, great-souled and selfless, the woman evil as woman can be: served to deepen his sadness at losing Herakles, his dismay at finding Helle. Although on more dispassionate reflection he felt no less bitter and disheartened, he found it hard to explain why he had contemplated putting an end to his life for such relatively inadequate reasons. For Herakles was no more lost to him than if he had sailed on to Kolchis; he had only to follow him back to Achaia to be received with love and tenderness. It mattered little to anyone that Helle's fate should remain unknown; she had so long been assumed dead by those most interested in her that only the restoration of the lost child grown into a woman lovable and worthy would justify a revival of the hope that she still lived. He need feel no shame in the failure of a quest that had so disastrously succeeded.

But he could not leave Ilion with the purpose of rejoining Herakles without Kleite, or the complete conviction that he could never win her love. Moreover he had looked forward to a happier ending to his search for Helle in order to have some deed with which to commend himself to Kleite; a story of perils encountered, hardships endured, patience and tenacity rewarded, honour accruing to his name in the minds of the Achaians. What was the truth of the matter? A few days of questioning in Abydos; a journey to Ida, a discovery made by chance through the lips of a jealous, unbalanced woman—and the sordid reality. It would shame his manhood to speak of this as an exploit in Kleite's hearing. Yet he had come near to killing himself in his mortification.

Hylas had not realised the extent to which the Korybantic frenzy had been communicated to his mind. He had thought himself immune, detached, dispassionate; but the tempestuous emotions whose display he had witnessed with such distaste and contempt: which had power to reduce normally intelligent and well-balanced people of higher intellect than his to capering maniacs: had not left him quite unmoved. Had his discovery of Herakles' spear in the hands of the tribesman been made an hour earlier; had the woman been pointed out to him divorced from the tumult and passion of the symbolic rite—though in all her depravity and horror—he would no doubt have been deeply stirred, but not to the point of utter desperation. Something primitive, elemental, had been let loose; a whirlwind of spiritual feeling which his impressionable soul had not been sufficiently stable to withstand.

His despondency on that journey back to Perkote was greatly lightened by the solid commonsense of his companion. Pielos, having seen only what his eyes had shown him, feeling nothing but the revulsion of an insensitive, bigotted mind against something it fails to understand, of which it heartily disapproves, dismissed the whole deplorable exhibition with a contemptuous shrug and spoke hopefully of other objects to which he and Hylas might devote their energies. Hylas was compelled to point out, though with all consideration for Pielos' feelings, the extreme impracticability of most of the schemes suggested by that ardent thirster after blood; but in

doing so his mind was led insensibly from its gloom. In suppressing his laughter he more easily smiled.

Their journey was uneventful. Whether or not Teukrias knew that Helle's identity was now known to Hylas he set no ambush for him. Hylas made his way to the house of Merops still undecided how much to reveal, how much to keep locked in his own mind. But as he looked into Kleite's grave, understanding eyes he knew that he must not lie to the girl who personified for him all that was good and pure and true.

"I have found Helle," he said.

"Where?"

"On Mount Ida, at the festival of Kybele. She is a notorious woman of Troy; she goes under another name with which I will not offend your hearing. Enough that she were better dead."

"You did not take long to find her, Hylas; and after so long. How did you discover her secret?"

"I had it from Teukrias." Hylas could not bring himself to tell Kleite what part Damia had played in the revelation, though he blushed for the deceit.

"Are you sure that he spoke truly?"

"The woman admitted it. When I called her by her name and she knew that she was discovered she told me how she had been found by a priest of Kybele and taken into his house; how her beauty had increased and with it the temptations by which she was soon beset. The rest is easily guessed, but she seems to have no regrets. On the contrary; for when I offered to restore her to her home she laughed at me, asking what attraction an obscure town in a land she had forgotten could offer in exchange for the life she led in Troy." Hylas paused, reddening. "I—tried to speak—as I thought you, Kleite, might have spoken; but I must have sounded to her very young, and innocent, and idealistic."

"These are not matters for shame, Hylas."

"I am very conscious of my own unworthiness," Hylas went on. "It did not become me to speak of such things to her, however high my purpose. Wherefore—I would rather not tell you what more she said; but I burn to remember it."

He raised unhappy eyes to Kleite's face.

"I had hoped," he said, halting and timid, "to come to you,

Kleite, to lay before you some honourable deed with which to mark my—my love for you. I have nothing to commend me now, for in this quest I have won no worship, nor shall I speak of it again. But my great love impels me to say what is in my heart: that I reverence your exalted spirit, respect your pure mind and—and adore the Kleite my eyes can see. I cannot hope that you would ever stoop to such as me: friendless, homeless and all unknown; but such as it is, obscure and inglorious, my love is yours, and shall be while I live.”

For a long time there was silence, while they looked into one another’s eyes. Then Kleite took Hylas’ brown hands in hers.

“You honour and humble me, Hylas,” she said in a low, shaken voice. “You say you have no honourable deed to lay before me . . . Oh, Hylas, what deed finer or more courageous than trying to win such a woman as that to your own high ideal of honour! Who more fitted than you to speak of such things? you, with nothing to hold before her but that which to you is more precious than all the treasure of Troy! Indeed and indeed, Hylas, you make me very proud, that you did this, as you say, for me.”

She paused, her eyes bright with tears.

“But I am not what you believe, Hylas,” she went on. “No goddess, no lofty spirit, but a weak and very imperfect woman. And because I have sinned—greatly, and beyond forgiveness of gods or men—I must put silence upon your lips when you speak of love. For love is not for me, nor ever can be; even such love as yours, Hylas, which, could I accept it, would raise and honour me. I cannot tell you what must lie forever hidden, nor shall I speak of it again. Enough that there is a barrier between me and the happiness of which I—sometimes—dream . . . that even your love can never break down.”

Her low voice trembled and broke; Hylas regarded her in bewilderment. Presently she looked up at him.

“I love you, Hylas, with all my heart and soul and mind,” she whispered, “and were I not burdened and heavy with guilt I would come to you willingly; proud to share your obscurity, your friendlessness, and though the sky were our only roof. Oh, I should know the splendour of high heaven, the glory of the gods! But . . . Ah, Hylas, pity me!”

And with a choking sob she turned and ran blindly from him.

* * *

“And so,” Hylas told Merops, “I have decided to return to Achaia. But when I have won a name and a home to offer your daughter I shall come back; and whatever secret lays between us shall be swept away.”

Merops nodded approval.

“She is young, and a woman,” he said. “You, too, are young—but a man. I shall hope great things of you, Hylas; no son could be more after my own heart.”

Hylas wasted no time in lingering farewells; the next morning he set out for Abydos. Pielos, much dismayed at losing him, had insisted on going that far and would have gone farther, but to this Hylas would not consent.

“Merops is old,” he said. “If he dies I do not know what Kleite will do. I leave you to watch over her, Pielos, knowing that some day I shall return to claim her. Be faithful in this and there will be a place for you thereafter at my side. Fail me, and I will tear out your heart with my own hands.”

Pielos laughed. “I have no fear for my heart,” he said. “I will watch over Kleite. Also that girl Damia. They are too much together these days.”

The road from Perkote to Abydos lay for the most part in sight of the narrow sea between the Dardanian coast and that of Thrakian Chersonesos; toward evening they came in sight of the town. Hylas, deep in his thoughts, felt suddenly a fierce grip on his arm as Pielos halted and swung him about. He was pointing excitedly at the sea.

“Have you seen that ship before?” he demanded.

Hylas stared, then uttered an exclamation. Although he had never seen the *Argo* from a distance he could make no mistake, and his heart raced with bursting pride as he marked the powerful dip and flash of oars in the late sun; the high bow-wave and the gleam of bodies that moved to a steady rhythm; men of Achaia, whom he knew, returning from the city of Aietes.

He started to run; as he neared the town people were already hurrying from their houses into the streets leading down to the shore. Hylas joined them, Pielos at his heels; eagerly they

watched the approaching ship, scanning the benches as it drew closer to see who were lost. At last with a mighty splash the anchor-stones went overboard; ladders were put over the sides and the crew began to wade ashore, shouting and waving their arms in greeting.

“Argus—Kastor—Orpheos—Polydeukes; I do not see Idmon or—Oh, Pielos, where is Iason?” And Hylas pushed his way to the waterfront. “Argus! Argus!” he shouted.

The old sailor stared incredulously; then he came leaping to Hylas, his hands outstretched.

“Why, boy,” he rumbled. “Why, Hylas!”

Inarticulate with delight he turned and shouted to the others, who crowded about him, seizing Hylas’ hands, patting his shoulders, talking, laughing, questioning until the boy felt dizzy. When he could make himself heard—

“Where is Iason?” he asked, half fearing the answer.

“Still aboard, safe and well. He has won himself a wife. See, there he stands in the bows, waving. What of Herakles?”

“Safe and well also. He is on his way back to Achaia. How did you fare at Kolchis?”

“Well enough, boy; well enough. We have brought back what we went for, and Aietes’ daughter into the bargain. Aye, and the son of Phrixos. Also we have had some little bickering here and there. But that will wait. How of you, Hylas? What befell you?”

Briefly Hylas gave an account of the attack on him and his subsequent return to Perkote, saying nothing, however, of Damia or the search for Helle. He promised to meet the Argonauts again after he had spoken with Iason, and bidding Pielos wait on the shore for him he waded out to the ship.

Iason’s joy as Hylas climbed over the side and smilingly held out his hands was real and unrestrained. Eagerly they asked one another of their experiences, questioning, replying, laughing and exclaiming without coherence. When each had gathered a rough idea of what had befallen the other Iason led Hylas to a dark, lovely woman who had been standing a little apart.

“Hylas of the Dryopes was my dearest friend on Pelion,” he told her. “Hylas, the daughter of Aietes has blessed me with her love. Her name is Medea.”

Hylas looked into black unfathomable eyes, and a chill struck into the deeps of his mind. Medea was lovely, but with the awful fascination of a snake; gracious and queenly, yet with more than a suggestion of latent fury and evil. Of these things, however, Iason seemed unconscious; he smiled happily, proudly, a man deeply in love and blind to all but the undeniable beauty of the dark woman who worshipped other gods than his.

"I have heard your name, Hylas, uttered with love and pride," Medea said. Her voice was low and clear, her words smoothly, carefully articulated. Hylas had a swift but vivid impression of the sinuous stealth of a hunting cat, the sibilant warning of a coiled serpent in rustling grass. Hardly he repressed an involuntary shudder; it came as a welcome diversion to hear a boy's fresh young voice call from the stern——

"Iason, may I go ashore?"

Iason turned and beckoned to the child; a fair boy of some seven years.

"We shall go when Argus has found a boat to carry us," he replied. As the boy came hopping between the empty benches——

"That is Phrontis, son of Phrixos and Chalkiope," Iason explained to Hylas. "Phrixos is dead, alas, but they say that he lives again in his son. Argus could not take his eyes from the child when first he saw him. Come here, Phrontis; this is Hylas, of whom you have heard me speak."

The boy smiled up into Hylas' face with the swift undoubting confidence of childhood.

"You shall teach me to shoot with the bow," he said. "Iason holds that you have no equal in the world."

Hylas made a modest disclaimer, but he was touched and pleased. Phrontis was a fine straight youngster; as he looked down into the boy's face, so vividly alive, so eager and wondering, Hylas remembered the woman on the mountain; the painted, drunken, vicious harpy who had been his father's sister. Impossible to believe that the same ancestral blood flowered in their veins; yet Helle, too, must once have been a laughing child like this, until she came into the hands of the men who had made her what she was now. In the boy's

lineaments he traced a faint elusive likeness to a face in his memory; when Phrontis smiled the corners of his mouth dipped first, while his eyes crinkled. A fascinating smile. No wonder that the woman who smiled like that had dominion over the hearts of men.

He regarded the boy for a long time as he spoke and laughed with Iason and Medea; the likeness became momentarily more discernible. Then from the side of the ship Argus hailed them and they went ashore together in the small boat he had brought.

Late that night, when all the story of their adventures was told—

“If you are returning to Achaia,” Iason said, “there is still a place for you in the *Argo*.” But Hylas shook his head.

“It would not be fitting that I should share the glory of your home-returning,” he said. “Also—I had meant to let the matter rest; but since seeing the son of Phrixos I feel a renewed desire to settle accounts with a man whom I have reason to dislike.”

“The connection is obscure to me,” Iason said, laughing.

“One day, perhaps, I will tell you the whole story. But not until its final episode has been written; perhaps in blood.”

* * *

The Argonauts stayed only one night in Abydos; Iason was in haste to return to Iolchos, claim his kingdom and settle down to a life of love with Medea. At Hylas’ request he promised to say nothing in Achaia of their meeting, nor to reveal to Herakles that Hylas still lived.

“For I have come to realise,” Hylas told him, “that I have been foolish, and worse than foolish; and I have much for which to ask his forgiveness. I would therefore find him unprepared for my coming, so that I may read for myself what love is left in his heart for me. Should I find that he remembered the boy he has lost more kindly than he regards the man who stands before him I will trouble him no more, for I have wearied him enough. I do not know how long it will be before I see him again; he may find others to take my place in his affection, and my coming may trouble him more than please.”

Though they considered that Hylas showed needless diffidence in the matter the Argonauts bound themselves with Iason to keep his secret. And so they sailed away, soon to come to Iolchos with the hard-won armour of Ares, to win the restoration of Iason to the throne of his fathers.

Hylas set himself to wait for the return of Teukrias.

It was unlikely that the priest would be back in Abydos for some days; having little to do Hylas went to Troy, having seen enough of it on his previous visit to arouse deep interest. While in the city he learned much of Astyoche, the name by which the woman of the mountain was known. All that she had told him was confirmed, though none knew how she had first come to Troy. The rest of his time there he spent in wandering among great houses, busy stalls of the market and upon the great towers and bastions of the walls.

On arriving back in Abydos he heard that Teukrias had that day returned. He made a circuit of the house, noting with grim amusement that the branches of the tree which had overhung the wall had been lopped away. Then he presented himself at the gate.

Rather to his surprise he was admitted at once; it seemed as if he was expected, for he met no question at the door of the house, but was led straightway into the presence of Teukrias.

The priest regarded him with a queer expression; Hylas frowned on him.

"I have found Helle," he said. Teukrias sighed.

"So I have learned," he replied. "I am sorry; very sorry."

"How did you know that my search had succeeded?"

"You heard the story from Damia, did you not? I made a mistake for which I shall never cease to blame myself in trusting my secret to a woman. But it was to save you from pain, Hylas; I should like you to believe that. Knowing that you had been much in Damia's company I thought her dear to you, and you to her. It confounded me to learn that in a moment of passion she had betrayed for your hurt what I had confided in her for the opposite reason." He smiled ruefully. "But I suppose that is the way of women. She is sorry now, and would cut out the tongue that had wounded you if by so doing she could repair the harm."

"I have not come here to talk of Damia, but of Helle; the child who fell into your hands and has become what she is. I have much to blame you for, Teukrias."

"I? What she has become is no fault of mine. I gave her the protection of my house. Unknown to me she took lovers—yes, even so young; not one, but many—and they enticed her from my roof. I tried to win her back; you yourself, I believe, made some such attempt, with a like result. How in all this am I to be held blameworthy?"

"Where did she go when she left your house?"

"To Troy."

"And where is she now?"

"I suppose she has returned there. The festival is over."

"You are talking of Astyoche, are you not?"

Teukrias glanced at him in some surprise.

"Yes; as I suppose you are?"

Slowly Hylas shook his head.

"I am talking of Helle, the daughter of Athamas and Nephele," he replied. "Helle, who came to your house ten years ago and has not left it since; Helle, who is here now—but goes by the name of Athaleia."

Nineteen

If Hylas had any doubt of the correctness of the thought born of little Phrontis' likeness to Athaleia it was dispelled by the blaze of fury in Teukrias' eyes as he started up. For a moment he was unable to speak for the violence of rage that rocked him; he turned livid beneath his paint and seemed about to attack Hylas—a development which the young Achaian awaited with composure. Steadily he met the fierce burning eyes of the priest; slowly he rose, making the most of a height and bulk that almost dwarfed the older man. The implied warning was not lost upon Teukrias.

"From the first moment of our first meeting you have tried to fool me," Hylas said. "You meant me to go to Mount Ida.

You placed in my path an obstacle which you knew would not deter me; would rather increase my desire to reach my goal. You told Damia a story which you were confident she would reveal, being the woman she is; and Astyoche would find the impersonation a small thing to do for a powerful and generous patron. Well, Teukrias, your cleverness succeeded—for a time; but I think that the high gods of Achaia are greater than Kybele, for they led me by a devious way to the truth. And now, Teukrias, we will talk of Helle, and what you have made of her."

Before Teukrias could utter the torrent of angry words and useless denials foreshadowed by his eyes a curtain at the farther end of the room was swept open and Athaleia appeared. She moved quickly to the side of the priest and laid a hand on his arm.

"Let me speak to him, Teukrias," she said. "Leave us for awhile. It is better so."

"I will not hide behind you, Athaleia. This young man has a quarrel with me; it must be settled now and forever."

"Where you have failed in your wisdom I without it may succeed. I will give my word and yours to Hylas that if after I have spoken to him he still requires satisfaction for a wrong, you will face him again."

Teukrias hesitated; then, to Hylas——

"It shall be as Athaleia wishes," he said, "but remember this: whatever she may see fit to say, I stand by what I have done. We shall no doubt meet again."

"There seems to be some disregard of my wishes in the matter," Hylas observed, though without heat. "If this is another of your subterfuges, Teukrias, it will help you little. Go, then; but, as you say, we shall undoubtedly meet again."

For a short time after the priest had left the room there was silence, while Athaleia regarded Hylas rather sadly. Then she sank into a chair, motioning Hylas to another.

"It is true that I am Helle, the daughter of Athamas and Nephele of Koronia," she said. "And, as you see, I am—what I am. But there are many things still hidden from you, Hylas, though you have succeeded in what you set out to do; to find me, with the intention of restoring me to my home." She paused;

then—"This is my home," she went on, "as it has been for ten years past, and as I hope it will be until I die. For I have been happy here, Hylas; happy beyond imagining. Happy as only a woman can be who loves and is loved with the tenderness and fidelity of gods."

Athaleia's voice held a depth of sincerity which Hylas could not doubt.

"You have no doubt assumed, in common with all Abydos, that I am vicious and degraded; that as a companion of a priest of Kybele who is sworn to perpetual celibacy I must be indifferent to the gods and a reproach in the eyes of men. You have only my word for it, Hylas, that this is far, far from the truth. Did I not judge you as a young man of more than ordinary understanding I should do no more than say to you, Believe what you like of me; nothing can compel me to leave this house; I am mistress of my own actions and indifferent to your opinion. But you have shown a perception worthy of more than that; you have met the guile of Teukrias with an honest, manly spirit that has won his respect as it has mine. Therefore I will tell you what is known to none in the world but Teukrias and me."

"I have no wish to hear what would pain you to tell me," Hylas said. "It is enough that I have found you and heard from your own lips that you are happy. Your secret, if you wish to preserve it, is safe with me, for in Achaia it is not even suspected that you still live."

"Far from giving me pain, Hylas, what I have to say will cause you, I hope, to share my pride. The deception practised upon you by Teukrias justifies an explanation of his motives."

"Could he—or you, Athaleia, not have told me from the beginning what I have heard already; which, as I have said, is all I need to know? Or, if he had to lie, why not have said that Helle was dead?"

"He could not have given you convincing proof; remember that you surprised him. As for telling you that Helle was in his house—well, you are strong and, for all he knew, violent. You might have made some attempt to carry me off. He wanted time to think. Also—"

She frowned thoughtfully.

"Teukrias is a peculiar man; to understand what I am to tell you, Hylas, you must see him with my eyes. His mind and its workings are as remote from yours as physically you have nothing in common. Your manner of thought is direct and, in a sense, uncomplicated; Teukrias is guileful, secret, subtle. I have often told him that his cleverness is likely to defeat its own ends; it has clearly done so now. I do not know how you discovered what he had taken such care to conceal, but I believe that his judgment was at fault in not telling you the truth at the beginning. For there is nothing in the truth of which he or I need be ashamed."

"I am already beginning to believe that."

Athaleia coloured slightly. "Teukrias is a priest of Kybele. You probably know that it is therefore impossible for any woman to become his wife—or his mistress. He entered the priesthood many years before he found me on the seashore where I had been thrown by the sea. I was unconscious, exhausted, almost dead from exposure. He carried me to his house, restored me and treated me kindly. At first I hated him for his appearance and manner, so different from the men I had known in Achaia; but as I came to know and understand him I realised that beneath his effeminacy and tortuous ways of thought there was a high and ardent spirit, a passionate aspiration and deep religious devotion to the goddess in whose service he had put from him forever those things which most men hold dear. He gave me the love of a father—the love I had been denied by Athamas. He was more to me than my mother, who could devise no better than to entrust me to the care of a pirate and slaver. It was to escape shame upon that shameful ship that I, a child of thirteen, cast myself into a stormy sea."

"You say that your mother gave you into the care of Malkos?"

"You know the Phoinikian's name, then? Yes, it was my mother. She had heard that Ino was plotting the death of Phrixos and myself; at one stroke, as I have since learned, she saved us and destroyed Ino. But it was a clumsy stroke, and ill-considered."

Hylas nodded slowly. "Ino was blamed for your disappearance. She died."

"Ah! And my mother?"

"Still lives, and is reconciled to your father. They long to welcome you again."

Athaleia shrugged. "And next year—who knows?—he may find another light of love who will hate me. Let him think me dead. My mind is set; whether Teukrias lives or dies I will go no more to Achaia. What of Phrixos?"

"He, too, is dead." Hylas repeated what he had heard from Iason. "I have seen his son. They say that he greatly resembles his father; his likeness to you is unmistakeable."

"Then I need wonder no more how you found me. When did you see him?"

"Since my return from Ida."

"I should like to have seen him."

"You still may; you have only to come with me to Achaia. You need not stay; I, too, shall soon return to Ilion."

"No. I will not leave Teukrias. He is far from young, nor is he in good health. I do not know how long he may live."

"Have you thought what will become of you then?"

"Yes; and I have chosen my course. Let us speak no more of that. You see, Hylas, I love him. Not as a daughter, nor as a wife, but with a love I despair of even trying to explain. The world is made of many kinds of people; the diversities of love are almost as great. I will not say that I have not sometimes dreamed of such things as other women value: youth, a hearth and small bright faces about my knees; but that is long past, and I have no regrets."

Athaleia rose and stood by a window, looking out over the sea.

"Teukrias loves me. There again I cannot define what I mean; enough that in his love I am happy and content. He is in some ways strangely humble and diffident; it is his constant fear that some day I shall turn from him at the call of a less exalted, more easily comprehensible emotion. That fear, Hylas, underlay his deception of you. He directed your search away from me and found it a goal. This he did in fear that by reminding me of old ties you would draw me away from him. I am proud, Hylas; proud of his love, the worth and disinterestedness of which none can judge but I. The effeminacy

of his appearance is imposed upon him by his faith; he was far different as a younger man."

She turned and faced Hylas.

"I do not expect you to understand all I have told you; my tongue is halting, my mind that of a simple, far from wise or clever woman. All I know is this: that if you still hold that Teukrias has wronged me, I am glad, happy to be thus wronged. I excuse nothing in him or me, make no plea, ask no favour. But I will not leave him while I live, nor call any place home but the roof that shelters the man I love."

Hylas rose, his face expressionless.

"I should like to speak with Teukrias again," he said.

Athaleia regarded him intently; after awhile she went to the curtain, drew it back and called. As Teukrias faced him——

"Such men as you and I," Hylas said, "can never be friends. Our minds and ways are as far remote as moon and sun; but I would not hold that one, following his appointed course, is of greater or less account than the other in working out the purpose of the high gods. I am young, and all inexperienced in matters beyond the handling of weapons and that which I can readily perceive. Your eyes, perhaps, see things to which mine are unopened. So let it be. But if we cannot be friends, Teukrias, nevertheless what I have learned to-day impels me to say: It is no intention of mine that we should be enemies. Give me your hand, therefore, and let us part in peace."

The old priest was clearly affected by the simple directness of the young man's words; he smiled, but there was nothing now of hostility or scorn in his face.

"We are cast, as you say, in different moulds," he said, "but perhaps we have more in common than you believe. Some day we may come to learn more of one another. Until that time, the blessing of Kybele go with you in all your ways."

Two hands met; the one strong, vigorous, brown, the other fine, white and delicate. Athaleia looked on smiling, her eyes bright. Little more was said; but Hylas left the house with a joyous heart.

Helle was found. Helle was happy; loved, loving, content. There was no more for him to do in Ilion.

* * *

"You've been a long time," Pielos said. "Did you break his neck?"

Hylas laughed. "Happily there was no need. Now, Pielos, I must find a ship that will carry me back to Achaia."

"Oh, that's already done. I am not unknown in Abydos. A ship is sailing early to-morrow for Lemnos; I have prevailed upon the master to find you a place. So for our last night together let us be merry."

"With all my heart," said Hylas; and merry they were.

Hylas felt strangely uplifted, as if his fortunes were on the turn. Much he had known of frustration and despair; the unexpected finding of Helle when he had thought his search already, most unhappily ended had given a new hope to his outlook. He would rejoin Herakles, making up to him some of the affection so long denied; claim his kingship and return to Kleite. In a matter of months, perhaps, he would be established, crowned with more than royalty, the blessing of Kleite's love.

It was with a glad and hopeful heart, therefore, that he said farewell to Pielos, and later watched the land of Ilion sinking slowly into the horizon as a fair wind speeded him on his homeward course.

At Lemnos he found another ship whose master, an Achaian of Euboia, agreed to carry him to the coast of Thessaly, from whence he would journey overland to Iolchos, there to begin his search for Herakles. Also he looked forward to learning how Iason had fared with Pelias. He had yet to decide whether or not to tell Nephele that her daughter still lived; much would depend upon his judgment of her when he met and spoke with her. If she was one whom the knowledge would gladden he might relate something of Helle's story, but he had no wish to provide the cause for another Achaian expedition, this time against friendly Abydos. Nephele and Ino between them had caused enough trouble. Women too easily set their men to peril and the shedding of blood. It would be well that this old quarrel should die; there would be wars enough, sprung from other, better causes, to content Achaia.

Lemnos, far astern, was beginning to fade as Hylas noticed for the first time an air of anxiety in the shipmaster, who glanced often to the north-east whence a strange sail seemed

to be drawing closer. Hylas observed the approaching ship with some curiosity. It was long and low, impelled by oars and sail; black and swift as some great skimming sea-bird. The shipmaster beckoned him.

"You will do well to string your bow and loosen the arrows in your quiver," he said, "for that is a Sidonian galley, and we are too far from land to escape her."

"Will they attack us, do you think?"

"Little doubt of it. It is in my mind that we are looking on the sun for the last time."

Hylas looked incredulous, but the shipman was serious enough. "The best we can hope," he said, "is to hold them off a little while, sending one or two of them to their foul heathen gods. After that——" He shrugged. "Well, I've had a good life. But you are young; if you cast yourself now into the sea on the other side they may not notice you; they are still far off. The gods may send another ship this way that will pick you up."

"It would be a poor thing to desert you at sight of a danger which may yet pass us by; also I would see something of the manner of men these Sidonians are. I have heard much of them, but little good. Let us await them, therefore, and bear ourselves against them as we may; we are in the hands of the gods, and much may happen before the sun goes down that I should be loathe to miss."

"You speak like a fool, but a gallant fool," the shipmaster growled. "Remain, then, if you must; but take shelter along the waist, where their bowmen and slingers will not find you a mark at the first discharge."

There was wisdom in this; Hylas lay close in the angle made by bulwark and deck, his quiver at his side, his bow strung. The Sidonian was closing quickly; the small crew of the merchantman had made ready their arms and were awaiting the assault with grim but hopeless defiance. More than one had leaped into the sea rather than risk falling into the pirates' hands.

The attack was opened by a hail of small stones which hummed across the deck like angry bees; the steersman was struck senseless and with a shout the shipmaster took his place at the steering oar. Then arrows began to fly; some, aimed high, found more than one who lay hidden by the ship's side

from the Sidonian bowmen. A thin, shrill trumpet-note sounded, and a clamour of voices. Hylas crept across the deck and rose in the shelter of the mast; those high-flying arrows were a danger from which the bulwark would not protect him.

It was hard to judge distance on the sea; moreover the movement of the ship disturbed his aim, and Hylas had no arrows to waste. His first shaft flew a trifle high, grazing the galley's mast above the head of a dark man in a red seaman's cap; even at that distance Hylas could see the indignation on his face as a splinter from the mast stung his shoulder. He raised his bow, but Hylas had taken his measure, and the Sidonian howled and shook a great fist as an arrow sang into his drawing-arm. Quickly he stepped behind the mast—and only just in time, for Hylas' next shaft would have taken him in the chest.

Arrows and stones hissed over the rapidly decreasing width of sea between the ships. Those on the merchantman did what they could, but their best was not enough; one by one they fell wounded or slain until only Hylas and three others remained on their feet, among them the shipmaster.

"We have done all that may be done," he called to Hylas. "I for one will never fall into their hands." And with a last roar of defiance at the Sidonians he plunged into the sea.

Hylas had less than a half-score of arrows left, but at that distance he could not miss. As the galley came alongside and grapples were thrown over the merchantman's bulwarks the black bow hummed its last song until every shaft was deep in a swarthy chest. Then Hylas put aside his bow and with spear and knife awaited the onrush of the yelling boarders. For one moment he allowed himself to recall Kleite's face, and breathed a prayer to whatever gods there be that she should go in happiness all her days; then the battle was upon him.

For awhile he gave a good account of Chiron's teaching, while his heart sang a fierce song to the thrust and glitter of his spear. For awhile his dextrous knife put aside the weapons of the Sidonians ringed about him while his keen spear struck and struck again. But he could not watch every move in that cunning circle. A cloak was suddenly flung over his head, blinding him; a rope passed about him, pinning his arms. A

press of men bore him down, raining blows upon him. He struggled desperately, hardly able to breathe; his heart swelled, his mind was clouded in a red mist, and oblivion came down upon him.

* * *

Voices were speaking close to him when his senses returned; their words were in a tongue unknown to him. He lay very still, not opening his eyes; this among other things he had learned on Pelion. Quickly he mustered the forces of his mind; cautiously he ascertained that he was tightly bound, but he was not wounded nor injured.

They had, then, spared his life, no doubt to use him as a slave. From what he had heard of them and seen that day these Sidonians as fighters were men of little account. Their taking of the merchantman had been by weight of numbers alone. None of those with whom he had fought had been considerable in either strength or weapon-skill. It should be a small matter, then, to win free of them.

But he was alone and they were many. Until he had taken the measure of his chances he would conduct himself meekly, so that they should be deceived in him. Herakles had often talked of what might be done in this situation or that; his guiding policy had ever been to delude his foes, causing them to underrate their adversary. When the time came to strike, the blow would be doubly effective by reason as much of its unexpectedness as its power—as if the ground upon which his enemies obviously trod had risen up to slay them. Hylas was glad of this good counsel now.

So he opened a dull, slow eye; listened with apathy to one who questioned him in his own tongue, replying briefly, sullenly; ignoring the taunts of those who singly could never have overcome him. In particular a dark man in a red cap, whose right shoulder was roughly bandaged, frowned upon him and uttered maledictions. Not by a flicker of animation in his lifeless eye did Hylas betray recognition; he stared up into the fierce dark face expressionlessly, as if dumb with animal resignation and despair.

In the end he was carried to a bench against a rowing thwart; a fetter was fixed to one ankle, one wrist before the

ropes which bound him were loosed, and the loom of an oar was thrust into his hands. This, then, was their purpose with him; this the reason why he had not been killed. The strength of his body was to serve his captors, helping to urge the black galley from one piratical exploit to another.

Though he bent to his new task with apparent subservience his mind was grimly amused: that he, who had left Achaia proudly pulling an oar in the illustrious company of the Argonauts should be brought to this—a rowing-slave in a Sidonian pirate-galley. And all because of the love and hate of a woman's undisciplined mind. He had Damia to thank for this.

And yet he would not have had it differently. For Damia had led him to Kleite; and to Kleite in the end he would return, whatever hardships were before him, whatever the pains and miseries to be endured. In thinking of her purity he would forget the villainy of his masters; in holding before him the vision of her bright spirit his own would be sustained. The time would come when he would show these crafty, cruel men of Sidon, these contemptible, undersized vermin of theseas, what tempest of might and fury they had all unknowingly chained to this oar; the oar, though he knew it not, that was to be the silent, only companion of his thoughts for three long years.

Twenty

Though not in a manner he would himself have chosen, Hylas now saw many places of which he had often heard and longed to visit. Sidon, Krete, Kypros, Rhodes; the flat wide delta of Egyptian Nile, the arid coasts of Libya, Karthage and the southern shore of the Middle Sea even to the Pillars of Atlas, those heights to north and south of the narrow strait where the boundless ocean's untravelled waters meet those known to men. The northern shore, too, where Tyrrhenia throws a long wide peninsula southward from lands inhabited by barbarian tribes; and back again to the Achaian coasts. Burned by summer suns, hardened by windy winters and

cold rains of spring, Hylas changed beyond the knowing of any friend. His smooth comeliness of face grew lined and stern; a rough beard hid the still sensitive mouth, the determined, resolute chin. From supple young strength his body developed to manly might; the great muscles of shoulder and thigh grew tireless through constant labour. Though the condition of the slaves was poor enough, nauseating too and evil-odoured, their life was not unhealthy. They were adequately fed; wise in his iniquity the slave-master saw to it that those upon whom the ship depended for the security of superior speed were not worked beyond their power, though his whip was ever ready to spur the indolent. Nor were abrasions or the chafing of fetters allowed to go untended, for a festering sore poisoned the blood, so that another man had to be found to fill the vacant place.

Though these things might have been far worse there were other matters to impress Hylas with the impotence of his strength and high courage in the face of captivity. For his self-control was hard put to it to witness impassively the ravaging of small towns and coast settlements; the agony of women, the slaughter of men, the wide-eyed terror of children. Without pity, inspired only by greed, the pirates missed no opportunity of taking what might be theirs with impunity. Sometimes they were intercepted, often pursued, and many a time escaped only by the labours of the gasping slaves, the whip cracking upon their streaming backs while stones and arrows flew about them.

Pursuing his self-set course, however, Hylas viewed these things with a dull eye, making no comment though at times the slaves muttered fiercely among themselves, even their hard stomachs turning at the sights they were forced to look upon. Masters and fellow-slaves came in the end to regard him as one of strong body but negligible mind and no spirit; a powerful machine, unmoved by blows, uncomplaining in every adversity; apathetic, lifeless as to his own identity; the living part of the oar to which he was chained. Nothing more than that, and thus disregarded.

As it fell out Hylas gained by this, though not by intention; for he came to be looked on with a queer sort of tolerance,

almost kindness—insofar as it was in the nature of a Sidonian to be kind. But never did he cease to plan his escape, watching every opportunity, debating every chance.

One course he had followed from the first day of his captivity. Whenever the oars lay idle he flexed the bones of his chained hand, making them supple, compressing them, trying to draw them through the iron band to which the chain was fixed. Careful to avoid notice he persevered in this, until he was at last successful in drawing his hand free, though with pain and difficulty. Satisfied, he then pushed the fetter again over his crushed knuckles, repeating the exercise whenever he could do so unobserved, knowing now that when the time came he could win the freedom of his hands.

His foot, however, could not be similarly disenchained, and he abandoned any hope of it after the first few trials. The chain was secured to the side of the ship by means of a ring on a deeply sunk bolt; to free himself he must wear the ring away, break a link of the chain or loosen the bolt in the tough wood. Much would depend on the circumstances attending the occasion on which he made his attempt; it must not fail, for he would never be given another chance. With a good axe he could free himself easily enough, but in the absence of such aid he must devise other means, working little by unnoticed little, until in one moment he could free hand and foot together.

To this end he began working on the bolt which held the ring, working it this way and that against the resistance of the stout plank in which it was held. For months it seemed as if he were labouring in vain, for his fingers felt no movement as he pressed and strained the stubborn metal. Then, one dark night when the ship lay anchored in a windless sea, an almost imperceptible yielding to his noiseless pressure rewarded him. Breathless, acutely apprehensive of discovery, he watched and listened; but only the heavy breathing of the sleeping slaves and voices and laughter from the lighted cabin in the high stern came to his straining ears. He tried again, thrilling to the realisation that the day of his escape would soon dawn.

But not yet; not for many a weary month more. That slight movement of the bolt was not the end of his labour but the beginning. Patiently he worked at it, not daring to enlarge

the socket so that it became visible to the slave-master's watchful eye; wriggling the bolt, twisting it, gradually, painfully, laboriously winning it free of the clinging wood in which it was so deeply embedded. Even so he had to leave something to chance; enough grip to hold the bolt against the movement of the chain as he rowed, yet not so much that he could not overcome its last resistance instantly at his need.

When at last he was satisfied that with one mighty wrench he could draw the bolt free, the third year of his bondage had closed.

In those three years he had learned more of the Sidonian speech than his captors dreamed. The rowing-slaves spoke many tongues, but were speedily taught to respond to various orders spoken in the language of the pirates. Hylas compared the orders given by the shipmaster with corresponding phrases in the Achaian speech; listened for familiar words as the pirates spoke among themselves, and gradually pieced together a fair knowledge of the tongue. Often he was able to gather from what was said in his hearing an idea of future plans, the course the ship was taking and the object and destination of the particular voyage. This unexpected knowledge he hoped to put to good use when the time came to rise against his masters. He would not be satisfied to slip overboard unseen into an unknown sea, perhaps far from land. There were certain matters to be remembered, accounts to be settled, with those who before his eyes had done so much evil. Also, having endured so long, he would wait until the ship came to a land he knew, where he could be sure of finding friends and shelter while he picked up the threads of his interrupted life.

So the black galley went her way, cursed by men and, if not blessed by gods, at least regarded by them with astonishing indifference, so that Hylas was led to ponder upon the strangely little preoccupation of the high ones with human happiness. For unquestionably the pirates prospered, trafficking in human bodies with less regard for their misery than if they had been beasts without a soul. Once, when a small boatload of Achaian youths and maidens was brought aboard, Hylas almost abandoned his self-imposed restraint; only by

reminding himself fiercely that he could hope to slay no more than one or two before being himself slain without having done the slightest good was he able to bend his head over his oar and give no sign of the fury that shook him. But he had a greater purpose than this. When he rose it would be with irresistible power and complete finality. The black galley and its crew should never sail again.

That he was one against many deterred him not at all. He had learned much of the pirates' methods, appraised the best of them and felt himself a match for them all, given the right conditions. That was all he awaited now; time, place and the opportunity for springing his surprise.

Of the forty oars, only a score were pulled by slaves; the rest were manned by pirates, some thirty of whom took turn and turn about, while another score worked the sails or lounged about when they were not making a land raid. In all perhaps fifty, then, were to be faced or tricked. Fifty Sidonians; crafty, evil, merciless; but only Sidonians.

The galley was moving north along the Ilian coast when the name of Dardanos was first mentioned in Hylas' hearing by one of the pirates, recalling to him his meeting with Anchises and the gift of the black bow. This weapon had been seized by the man in the red cap who, unable to bend it to the full, nevertheless carried it and showed much pride in its possession. Hylas had watched it jealously through many a seafight and marauding expedition ashore; glad when it returned safely to the ship, sighing for the dishonour with which it was being stained by the evil hands that bore it. This was one of many such scores to be settled on the day of his arising.

He had thought the mention of Dardanos to have been incidental to a discussion of Ilion, but as the galley moved steadily northward the name of the town was more often upon the pirates' lips, uttered with a significance that quickened his interest. Dardanos was not strongly defended, but it was contrary to the pirates' usage to attack a town even moderately well guarded. This foray, then, was some new thing, and Hylas set himself to learn all he could about it.

Dardanos was the chief city of the province of Dardania, a dependency of Troy. The palace of Anchises alone was rich

enough to warrant its sacking; also wealthy merchants had houses there, no mean prizes in themselves. Given the element of surprise the pirates might gain more in that one attack than by months of lesser raids. Nevertheless the project was unusually bold; probably in that very fact lay the inspiration of the idea, for Dardanos had been free from such assaults for many years, and doubtless what watch was kept was less than keenly alert.

The city lay at the southern end of the narrows between Ilion and Thracian Chersonesos, and only a few hours by sea from Lemnos, where the pirates had an understanding with the king of that island which provided them with an anchorage there in return for certain goods and services scrupulously exacted and paid. There had been enmity between Lemnos and Ilion for many years; it was not improbable, therefore, that the venture against Dardanos had been inspired by the king of the island himself.

Not until the galley stood off from Lemnos one summer evening on a north-westerly course, however, was Hylas certain that the attack was in fact about to be launched. This, he felt, was his moment; this was the signal for the ending of his captivity, the beginning of a new life or the end of all things for him. His heart beat high at the prospect of action; he turned over in his mind every ruse he had contemplated, every detail of the ship and crew, so that when the moment came no unforeseen chance should battle against him.

Night had fallen when the galley came to the mouth of the narrows; a moonless night, though bright with stars, by which the helmsman steered his course. Gradually the black outline of the land became more familiar to Hylas, though he had seen it only once from the sea; as the galley edged its stealthy way towards the shore, sail struck and oars heavily greased in their thwarts, he looked upward to see the dark shape of Anchises' palace against the glittering sky.

The raiding party, numbering all the available strength, were gathered in the waist; ladders were ready, while the leadsmen muttered the soundings. Close to Hylas stood the man who bore his black bow; he was staring out over the water, clearly feeling no great enthusiasm for the venture.

As the slave-master muttered an order which was passed in whispers from bench to bench, Hylas bent down and slipped his fingers through the chain-ring by his knee. A twist and a wrench loosened it; carefully he turned it to and fro so that it came noiselessly from its socket; assured that no eye was upon him he thrust the bolt into the band about his ankle where it would not clank as he moved. Then, with yet greater caution, he began to free his wrist.

With growth and labour his hand and wrist had swelled, so that it was almost more than he could do now to pass his tightly-compressed knuckles through the band. Here, however, he was unexpectedly helped by the liberal greasing the oars had received to ensure silence; for under cover of the darkness he was able to transfer a good deal of the slippery fat to his fetter. Perspiration streamed down his face, however, as he strained grimly and in silence; he felt the hard skin burst and tear, the sticky blood mix with the malodorous grease. Little by little, in agony of mind and sense, he forced his crushed hand through the cruel unyielding iron, until a sudden easing of the almost intolerable pain told him that he was free.

Free! After three years of evil and hardship and the suspension of every fine and generous impulse. Free, to strike at tyranny and cruel oppression; free to aid the friends who slept so near, all unknowing what dark merciless enemy crept upon them from the sea. Free, a mightily powerful force in the midst of his foes, unconsidered, forgotten, of less account than the deck they trod. Free; but as yet unarmed.

The ladders were lowered with never a splash to warn a listening ear. Silently the pirates, with spear, knife and axe sharpened for swift murder, disappeared over the side into the waist-deep sea, until only the man who carried Hylas' bow remained—a laggard even in assassination.

Then like a shadow beside him Hylas rose, and caught him about the neck with a big forearm. He uttered no cry, for his head was being bent back—back. . . .

The slaves behind Hylas stared in astonishment. There was something supernatural to them in this sudden, inexplicable freeing of a man chained as themselves. There had been no sound to reveal the manner of his release; yet he was free.

Clearly this was a matter in which the gods were interested; they would be wise to keep silence. . . . As Hylas laid the man on his now empty bench, his twisted head lolling over the handle of the oar, he whispered to the slaves in the nearest benches.

“By dawn you shall be free. Keep silent, nor suffer blows or whips to make you row if the pirates come back. I shall return.”

And with his precious bow, a quiver of arrows and a short-handled axe which he had taken from the dead man’s hand he swung himself silently over the ship’s side. Incredulously the slaves watched him striding through the star-lit water, a god of vengeance freed and terrible; eagerly they muttered among themselves after the blackness had swallowed him up; listening then, their hearts uplifted with breathless hope when hope had long seemed dead.

What wind there had been during the day had fallen with sunset. The sea was quiet, the town asleep. Only from an upper room in Anchises’ palace a single light shone, to which the eyes of the slowly advancing line of men were drawn. In the shallowing water they paused while two went forward to see that the beach was clear. The silence was so deep that each man heard the beating of his own heart, and the mournful cry of an inland owl. Nerves were taut, uneasy, as ears strained for the least sound of an alarm; a careless foot swishing in the knee-deep water made men start, their hearts racing with fear of discovery. Even a heavy breath sounded in that tense stillness.

From behind them a mighty bellow split and shattered the silence.

“Arise, men of Dardanos! An enemy is upon you! Arise!”

In the galley the listening slaves shivered with superstitious awe, as to the voice of Poseidon, god of the sea. The effect on the Sidonians was terrific. As the roaring words boomed over the water, rang among the rising hills and came echoing back to the desolate beach they stared about them, their minds reeling and blind with dismay. Then from closer and to their right the great voice roared again to the answering hills.

“Arise, Dardanos! Arise! Arise!”

A light appeared high up in the town; a faint, far shout,

and a nearer crash as a door was flung wide and men came running into the street. Other lights, more voices; torches, and the gleam of arms. The pirates hesitated, not knowing whether yet to go forward and trust in their numbers to win something from the Dardanians' unreadiness or to turn back before their way of retreat could be cut.

“Arise! Arise!”

The great voice roared again, now from the other end of the line. Arrows began to hiss and splash as the men of Dardanos heard their movements and saw them faintly in the dim light of stars. Panic spread among the superstitious Sidonians; this awful voice came from neither the land nor the ship. It was obviously not one of themselves; unseen, all-seeing, a protecting deity guarded Dardanos. They turned and began to wade back to the galley.

Then from the sea before them a great form rose, long-haired, wild-bearded, with glittering eyes and an upraised arm, bellowing, formidable, terror-inspiring; an axe crashed down and a man fell.

Then Hylas was among them, his heart bursting with the accumulated fury so long repressed. The limbs that slavery had made strong and tireless now served him well against those who had misused him. Desperate with fear, yet fighting because there was no other way of winning to the ship, the shorter Sidonians floundered and splashed in thigh-deep water while Hylas strode forcefully where he would, bellowing and smiting, knowing every man for his foe.

From the water's edge the Dardanians heard and wondered, holding back arrow and spear since in the darkness they might hurt this unseen, unknown ally. But some among them, curious and battle-thirsty, rushed into the sea; and the Sidonians were compelled to turn and meet them.

Then Hylas laughed, and shook his axe, and roared with the joy of slaughter and revenge. Bleeding, drenched with salt water, almost naked, he strode back to the galley and climbed aboard. His axe crashed upon the chains of the wide-eyed slaves; one by one they were freed from the hateful benches and ran shouting to the ship's side, to which the Sidonians had now been pressed by the men of the town.

As the pirates set foot on the ladders, however, iron-ringed hands from above pushed them out and away, so that those climbing were thrown back into the water. Then the great heavy oars began to lift and fall among them, moving unpredictably, without aim. Caught between the town's defenders and the risen slaves aboard their ship, all hope of escape denied, the pirates fought desperately. No mercy was asked, no quarter given; hated and unhallowed they had lived, unpitied one by one they died in the flurrying sea.

Hylas leaned panting against the mast of the galley, while the slaves ransacked the cabin of its treasures, screaming and capering about him with vessels of gold and silver, priceless silks, the riches won from many a voyage, raids upon which they had looked indifferently with no thought that some day the plunder would be theirs. They crowded about Hylas, laughing, praising, patting him, heaping the deck at his feet; but he heard and saw with less than half his mind.

For his eyes were turned to the eastward, where the dark perspective of Ilion faded into sky and sea; toward Abydos, and to Perkote where Kleite lived; Kleite, upon whose face, after three weary years of travail and suffering, he would soon look again.

* * *

When Hylas was led by the king's command to the palace on the hill, Anchises regarded him and laughed softly.

"You are somewhat changed, Hylas, since last I saw you," he observed, "but no less welcome. I have much to thank you for; that, by your leave, will wait until you are fed and rested."

"I had thought to return to Ilion rather less ostentatiously," Hylas replied, "and a trifle more seemly to eye and nose. I will gladly eat and rest; as for anything I may have done to win your regard, it is a small matter, and one which I have long purposed. Let it be."

Early next morning Hylas with the king was rowed out to the guarded galley, and laughed aloud at what he saw. The slaves had found the pirates' wine: evidences of a wild night were clear to see. Many of them, when their only remaining desire was for sleep, had crept confusedly back to the only home they knew: the rowing-bench at which they had lived

and toiled so long. Others lay where they had fallen, in the cabin or on deck, still clutching the prizes which they had snatched from the Sidonian store of plunder.

Anchises looked about him with wrinkling nose.

"I do not care much for your friends, Hylas," he remarked. "It is small wonder to me that you took such pains to leave them. When they recover their senses, however, you may have even greater trouble in escaping them. My advice to you is to travel fast and far, unless you want to be established as a deity."

"I have still my kingship to regain," Hylas replied. "One visit I must make—to Perkote. Then again to Achaia."

"Must you take the chance of falling again into bondage on the sea?"

"I cannot offer the woman I love less than the utmost to which I may attain."

"Ah!"

For awhile Anchises was silent and thoughtful. As they were rowed back to the shore:

"Are you so bound, then, to these Dryopes of yours? Is theirs a life to which you would willingly take a wife?"

"They are simple folk, but they are my own. I know no other home."

"As to that, a roof, a sufficiency for your needs and a loving wife make, I imagine, all that a man requires his home to be. Can you not expect to find these in Ilion?"

"Possibly. But although I love dearly, I look beyond immediate years. Crops may fail, storms shatter my roof. I will not expose my wife to want or hardship."

"Yet among the Dryopes, as you have told me——"

Hylas sighed. "Much will depend on how I find them," he said. "It is possible——"

"Yes?"

"That I may not come back to Ilion at all."

"Ah! And are you so proud, Hylas, as to leave this woman to look vainly for you, while you have a claim upon Dardanos which its king will hasten to meet?"

"I have done nothing worthy of mention beyond the settling of a few private scores. It was by chance that my opportunity came at Dardanos. You owe me nothing for that."

"I cannot conceive how you brought yourself to receive that bow from me—as a gift to which you had no shadow of claim."

Anchises' tone had cooled; Hylas regarded him with surprise.

"And if we are to talk in terms of strict account, Hylas, I have a claim to advance which even Laomedon of Troy could not deny. Hylas, you are my prisoner."

"Your prisoner? What are you saying?"

"More; you are my bondsman. An escaped slave. As such you are mine, for you sought refuge on my shores."

"Ah! And how do you propose to enforce your claim?"

"I shall need your help."

Hylas began to laugh. Anchises smiled.

"In southern Ilion, at the foot of Mount Ida," he said, "is a small but pleasant town called Antandros. In recent years its importance has increased, for a good deal of coast shipping passes in and out of the harbour, and the dues and revenues form quite a substantial amount. Unhappily it is far removed from my surveillance, and I fear that what I receive is considerably less than my right. For a long time I have been looking about me for a man whom I can trust to rule there in my name; a man strong, honest and true, direct in thought, quick and decisive in action. But it is incredible, Hylas, that among the few—the very few—whom I would entrust with the governorship, none cares to leave the home to which he has been long attached, even though I offer a reward of some consideration."

Hylas was silent. Anchises regarded him with a smile.

"Your coming, Hylas, has settled the problem for me," he went on, "for in you I find a man homeless, ambitious, with every quality the situation demands—and my bondsman. I command you, therefore—and think not to disobey—to go to Antandros forthwith, there to show the traders of that place that their king is not lightly to be cheated."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then, Hylas, I shall establish Merops of Perkote in the place; taking care to let him know that you declined it first."

Hylas and Anchises looked into one another's eyes. Then Hylas nodded, his mouth twitching.

"Since henceforth you are my liege lord," he said meekly, "how can I disobey?"

"Precisely," said Anchises, with complacency.

Twenty-one

"Ah!" said Pielos. "I see you have grown a beard."

Hylas gravely agreed with this acute observation.

"What of Kleite?" he demanded.

"Safe, well, not unhappy—and unmarried."

"That is as it should be."

"At first she saw too much of that girl Damia, as I thought. So I put a stop to that, for awhile."

Hylas smiled.

"You did? How?"

"Well, I don't know exactly how it came about, but——"

Pielos paused and regarded Hylas almost defiantly. "I—I married her."

Hylas stared at him and began to laugh. Pielos, rather red, gazed on him with solemnity.

"When I was assured that there was no more harm in her," he went on, "I permitted her friendship with Kleite to continue."

"Ah! You did that!"

"Yes. They are together now, in the garden."

"I will go to them. Wait here for me, Pielos; I have much to say to you after."

As Hylas looked about him in the tranquillity of that quiet garden he felt strangely moved. Thrice the flowers had bloomed, the leaves fallen, since he stood here; the sun had shone for Kleite, mellowing grape and fig, as it had beaten down upon his blistering back. Winds had moved among the trees, perhaps the same blind winds as had filled the sail of the black galley. And Kleite had sat here; moved quietly amid the flowers, looked up at the stars which had drawn his thoughts to her. She had most mercifully walked in peace, while his ways had been far other, among evil men.

Well! All that was past. He had come back, as he had promised, and all that lay between them should be swept away.

He moved softly through the trees to the place where she most loved to sit: the old stone seat beneath a tree, where he had sat with her on the first day of his arising from the illness through which her hands had drawn him back to life. As he saw her there with Damia now, lovelier even than he remembered, his heart gave a great leap and the hot tears for a moment blinded him. Though very much a man in body and mind, he still had the heart of that diffident boy who had found the lasting splendour and glory of love in this pleasant garden. Through all the pain and misery and horror that he had endured he had kept his dream pure and inviolate.

He gathered himself, though he trembled, and walked forward. At the sound of his footsteps Damia glanced over her shoulder, frowning a little at sight of this big, bearded stranger, wondering if he was one whose name she should recollect.

But Kleite's eyes widened and became living light; her shaking hands fluttered to her fluttering, foolish heart.

"It is Hylas!" she breathed. "Oh, Hylas!"

And she rose quickly, and ran, and flung herself sobbing joyously into his open arms. And for awhile neither spoke, while the bitter years melted away.

"I have come back to claim you, Kleite," Hylas said. Damia had slipped quietly away; they were alone. Kleite looked up into his face, deeply into his adoring eyes; she smiled, and led him to the seat beneath the tree.

"You are much changed, Hylas, my dear one. Greatly changed. But your eyes are the eyes I loved, and have remembered."

"Because they have looked on you, Kleite. There is no power in earth or heaven to dim the memory that has sung upon me in every lonely hour since."

"Tell me what you have done, where you have been, how at last you have come back to me?"

"That can wait. Kleite, I bring you my love; rank, comfort, all your heart can desire. Will you marry me?"

For awhile there was silence; the small hand in Hylas' great fist shook and fluttered.

"I told you once—that, dearly as I loved you, I could not marry you," she murmured in a sorrowful voice. "Nothing has changed, Hylas."

"Ah! I have thought much of that, Kleite; I have had much time for thinking since last I saw you. And I have sworn that nothing shall stand between us."

"Then I fear—indeed I fear—that you have sworn vainly."

"Not so; for in the silence of lonely nights I have recalled your words, and all that lay behind them. Kleite, your secret I do not mean to ask, or force from you. This only you shall tell me: it has to do with Kyzikos, has it not?"

"Yes. Oh, Hylas, ask me no more!"

"It is not my purpose to do so. You shall bear your secret unrevealed till your life's end if you so desire. But grant me this, Kleite. If, as you say, you are guilty of some fancied fault——"

"Ah, Hylas! No fancy; no mere fault!"

"——then if men cannot comfort you, will you beseech the forgiveness of Kybele?"

"I have done so, with tears and shame. But there has been no sign; no sign!"

"Then, Kleite, the goddess must be made to listen; for this is a matter affecting me, and I claim the right to be heard. I have brought with me to Perkote a priest of Kybele; one whose name is known and respected through all Ilion as a devoted servant of the goddess. It is my wish that you should reveal to him what lies hidden in your heart; ask of him if the way you have chosen is as Kybele decrees, and bind yourself with solemn oaths to abide by his wisdom and inspiration. I, too, unknowing what secret lies so heavily upon you, will take the same vow. If it is his word that you are right and that we may never come together in love, I shall not speak to you of love again. But if . . . Oh, Kleite, you cannot deny me this!"

Kleite stared at Hylas with eyes in which a radiant, breathless hope was coming to tremulous life.

"I—dare not believe—that he . . . Oh, Hylas! after all I have suffered, to know the burden lifted from my spirit, happiness^o mine! Hylas . . . whatever comes, I have never loved you more. Bring him to me; now, if he is here; and—Oh, Hylas, pray for me!"

* * *

When Teukrias returned to his house in Abydos he found Athaleia waiting for him with a curiosity that she made no

attempt to dissemble. For awhile Teukrias put her questions aside; but in the end he shrugged, smiled and sat beside her.

“My capacity for wonder at the diversity of the human mind was, I believed, extinguished,” he told her, “but since speaking with this Kleite I find it awakened anew. Kleite, I might mention, is a most attractive young woman; I have quite lost my heart to her.”

“I advise you to say nothing of the matter to Hylas.”

“On the contrary, he seemed much gratified by my approbation.”

“Then he could not have taken you very seriously.”

“A conclusion I myself reached, not without relief.”

“I still do not know what was troubling her.”

“A dream.”

“A dream! And for that she would have denied the love of such a man as Hylas!”

“Certainly; and not without good reason. It tried my utmost powers of persuasiveness to convince her of what she was dying to believe.”

“Ah! Then you succeeded?”

“In matters of that kind I do not fail.”

For a moment there was a derisive light in Athaleia’s eye, of which Teukrias was not unaware. He went on rather hastily—

“As Hylas had surmised, her trouble was connected with Kyzikos. Though she said nothing of it, the poor girl hated him from the first moment of their marriage. She admitted without reserve that she had nothing against him; it was one of those deep, elemental aversions which mere reason can never conquer. His kisses repelled, his embrace nauseated her, so that her flesh shrank and quivered at his least touch. She tried to overcome her disgust and loathing, trusting her father’s belief that love would come to her. She reminded herself of the young man’s excellent qualities and submitted to the ardour of his love, suffering a sort of physical martyrdom uncomplainingly, though it seared her virginal spirit. Then, in the night, when Kyzikos lay sleeping by her side, she had a dream: that Kyzikos had gone forth to battle and was slain. The dream was so vivid, her passion of relief so intense, that she awoke—to hear the alarm as the Argonauts, unknowing and unknown,

set foot on the shore from which they had earlier departed. And Kleite let Kyzikos go, feeling certain that it was to death, without revealing her dream."

"Had she told him he would only have laughed at her, or kissed away her fears. He would have gone, all the same."

"No doubt. But Kleite, whose father has the second sight, and has received evidences of it in herself, knew with the utmost certainty of conviction that Kyzikos would die. And she made no attempt to hold him back. There, in her view, lay the crime. Not in failing to hold him back, but in not making the attempt. In her own eyes she was a murderer."

"I begin to understand. Poor Kleite!"

"But here is the paradox, Athaleia. Had she loved him dearly, as a woman loves the husband who is all her life, she would yet have sent him forth, saying nothing of her dream. For that would have been her duty. She would not have stood between her man and his honour, though he died and her heart was broken. The same process, the same result; but a different motive. Her heart was not broken; she was almost dazed with joy and relief; but because she had sinned she resolved to atone by foreswearing love and happiness for as long as she lived—in the name, if you please, of Kybele, the Great Mother!"

"Oh! And what had you to say to that?"

Teukrias looked steadily at Athaleia.

"I was inspired to tell her that it was clearly by the will of Kybele that Kyzikos had died; that the storm had been sent, the Argonauts blown back to Kyzikon to no other end. That her dream had been not a warning but an injunction; that her lips had kept silent not of her own will but by that of the Mother."

"And did she believe you?"

"Not until I pointed out what should have been obvious: that had Kybele meant to save Kyzikos' life she would have sent the dream to him, and not to Kleite. For the Great Mother, from whom nothing is hidden, knew how she loathed the love of her husband; it was too much to expect that she should hold him back."

"But why send her the dream at all?"

"Happily," Teukrias said, "it did not occur to Kleite to ask me that. No doubt I should have found an answer; but I was glad that the point did not arise."

"It seems a fairly logical consequence to me."

"Probably; but then, you are not in love with Hylas."

Athaleia turned slightly pink.

"No," she agreed slowly, "I am not in love with Hylas." Then, seeing Teukrias' sardonic eye upon her, she smiled, laying her hand in his.

"Tell me," she said, "did you believe everything you told Kleite?"

"I certainly believed everything I said while I was saying it," the priest replied, with a slight twitch of his lips. "And if by chance I was not divinely inspired—why, I have made two people happy, and harmed none. I cannot think that I have greatly sinned."

Athaleia laughed.

"Sometimes, my dear," she said, "I begin to suspect that you are almost human. And that, as I truly believe, is even greater than being a priest."

* * *

So Hylas and Kleite were married, and went to pleasant Antandros, there to make up for the wasted years and the sorrow of their hearts. Pielos went with them, and Damia too; Hylas rose high in the estimation of Anchises, and Teukrias played no small part in their happy lives.

In the spring a son was born to Kleite, whom they named Achates; and none more proud than Hylas since the world began as he looked for the first time into the tiny face. Much he recalled in that moment; his own father, Herakles, Megara; Chiron, Iope, the setting forth from Iolchos; Damia, and Kleite's face as he opened his eyes in a darkened room. Here, then, was the end of his story; here the symbol of his love, and the happiness that would henceforth be his.

Much more was to happen to him, however, before he closed his eyes on the world wherein he had lived so fully, so bravely, so loving and deeply loved. But what befell him; how Herakles came again to Ilion; how he and Hylas met again, and when and where—why, that is another story.

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